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# The WORD FOR YOU TODAY

June • July • August

Spring of Life Church  
4711 116th St. SW  
Mukilteo, WA 98275

SMX



Spring of Life Church  
[www.springoflife.us](http://www.springoflife.us)

**A Letter From  
PASTOR VICTOR  
AVDEEV**

***Spring of  
Life Church***

It is our pleasure to provide you this free gift.

Our church family recognizes the value not only of this devotional, but also in setting aside time each day to spend with God. In order to grow to be like Christ we must make time every day to read the Bible, use a devotional like this one and talk to God. We hope this booklet will help you accomplish that each day.

If you don't have a church home, we invite you to join us at Spring of Life Church. We all need a place to belong and we think you'll find Spring of Life is that kind of place.

Check us out on Sunday, or go to [www.springoflife.us](http://www.springoflife.us) to find out more about us. Come as you are and join us for an upbeat, contemporary service with a teaching that is relevant to the needs of today.

Changing Lives, Strengthening Families & Impacting Communities!

Pastor Victor Avdeev

**Service Times**

Sunday Morning Worship 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Sunday Evening Youth Service 6:30 p.m.

**Spring of Life Church**

4711 116th St. SW  
Mukilteo, WA 98275  
(425) 493-1602  
[www.springoflife.us](http://www.springoflife.us)

JUNE • JULY • AUGUST

THE  
**WORD FOR YOU TODAY**

**STRENGTH AND GUIDANCE FOR DAILY LIVING**

## Why use different translations and paraphrases?

For two important reasons. First, the Bible was originally written using 11,280 Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words, but the typical English translation uses only around 6,000 words. Obviously, nuances and shades of meaning can be missed, so it is always helpful to compare translations.

Second, we often miss the full impact of familiar Bible verses, not because of poor translating, but simply because they have become so familiar! We think we know what a verse says because we have read it or heard it so many times. Then when we find it quoted in a book, we skim over it and miss the full meaning. Therefore we have deliberately used paraphrases in order to help you see God's truth in new, fresh ways.

### INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS

*All Scripture references are from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.*

AMP	Amplified Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
GNT	Good News Translation
GWT	God's Word Translation
NAS	New American Standard
NCV	New Century Version
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRS	New Revised Standard Version
PHPS	The New Testament in Modern English
TEV	Today's English Version
TLB	The Living Bible
TM	The Message

## ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

### Old Testament

Genesis	Ge	Ecclesiastes	Ecc
Exodus	Ex	Song of Solomon	SS
Leviticus	Lev	Isaiah	Isa
Numbers	Nu	Jeremiah	Jer
Deuteronomy	Dt	Lamentations	La
Joshua	Jos	Ezekiel	Eze
Judges	Jdg	Daniel	Da
Ruth	Ru	Hosea	Hos
1 Samuel	1Sa	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2Sa	Amos	Am
1 Kings	1Ki	Obadiah	Ob
2 Kings	2Ki	Jonah	Jnh
1 Chronicles	1Ch	Micah	Mic
2 Chronicles	2Ch	Nahum	Na
Ezra	Ezr	Habakkuk	Hab
Nehemiah	Ne	Zephaniah	Zep
Esther	Est	Haggai	Hag
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zec
Psalms	Ps	Malachi	Mal
Proverbs	Pr		

### New Testament

Matthew	Mt
Mark	Mk
Luke	Lk
John	Jn
Acts	Ac
Romans	Ro
1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Corinthians	2Co
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Php
Colossians	Col
1 Thessalonians	1Th
2 Thessalonians	2Th
1 Timothy	1Ti
2 Timothy	2Ti
Titus	Tit
Philemon	Phm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jas
1 Peter	1Pe
2 Peter	2Pe
1 John	1Jn
2 John	2Jn
3 John	3Jn
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rev

- Scripture citations are given in parentheses: **(Jn 3:16-18 NIV)**. This means the verses come from the New Testament book of *John*, Chapter 3, verses 16 through 18. The translation is the *New International Version*.
- If this Scripture is referred to again in the same devotion, the citation may be abbreviated as **(v. 16 NIV)**, which means "verse 16, *New International Version*," or **(vv. 17-18 NKJV)**, which means "verses 17 through 18, *New King James Version*."

# HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS DEVOTIONAL

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## SET ASIDE A DEFINITE TIME EACH DAY TO READ IT.

Ask God, "What are You saying to me?"

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## IS SOMEONE YOU KNOW HURTING?

Give them a copy. It could change their lives.

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## ARE YOU IN BUSINESS?

Give it to your clients and customers.

---

## DO YOU WORK IN A HOSPITAL...A PRISON... A REHAB CENTER...OR A RETIREMENT HOME?

This devotional is the perfect tool  
for reaching people with God's love.

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"The prudent [wise] considers well his steps."

TAKE THE PLUNGE (1)

After you've prayed, planned and prepared, there comes a point where you've got to take the plunge. Is it scary? Absolutely! There are two kinds of people. Those who leap before they look; they are driven by impulse. Then there are those who look, and look, and look but never leap; they are controlled by fear. Which are you? To get to the Promised Land, Israel had to cross the River Jordan at flood tide. It must have made the strongest heart skip a beat. God had promised that when the feet of the priests carrying the ark stepped into the water it would roll back. Can you imagine their thoughts? 'Couldn't we wait until the tide goes down? Why do I have to go first? What if the waters don't roll back and I drown?' The step between prudence and paranoia is short and steep. Prudence wears a seatbelt; paranoia avoids cars altogether. Prudence washes with soap; paranoia avoids human contact altogether. Prudence saves for old age; paranoia clings to every penny. Prudence prepares and plans; paranoia panics. Prudence calculates the risk and takes the plunge; paranoia never enters the water. To reach your God-ordained destiny you must quit holding back, obey God and step into the water. The moment you do, doors will begin to open and resources will be released where there now seems to be only shortage. God will provide the means, the method, and the manpower. So stand on His promise: 'I have loved you; therefore I will give *men* for you, and *people* for your life. Fear not, for I am with you' (Isa 43:4-5 NKJV).

"Underneath are the everlasting arms."

TAKE THE PLUNGE (2)

Picture this: a father and his two small children are at play. He's in the pool, and he invites them to run and jump into his arms. One does, the other doesn't. The one who doesn't, watches gleefully, applauds, and jumps up and down. But when her dad invites her to do the same she shakes her head and backs away. Is that you? Living on the edge of the pool, never taking the plunge, happy to experience life vicariously through others? Preferring to take no risk, rather than any risk? For fear of the worst, you never enjoy the best. You say, 'But I'm not sure what I'm jumping into!' Read this: 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' *Foolishness* is closing your eyes and jumping before you know there's even water in the pool, or that your father has said, 'Come, I'll catch you.' *Faith* is knowing that the only way to conquer your fear of the water is to take the leap, because the One who is calling you has been there for you from the moment you became His child. Nothing is more important to Him than your safety, the development of your faith, and your total success in life. God told Joshua, 'Arise, go over this Jordan...to the land which I am giving [you] ...Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go' (Jos 1:2, 7 NKJV). Note the words, 'Arise, go, be strong.' In other words, take the plunge!

SATURDAY JUNE 1  
Pr 14:15 NKJV

SUNDAY JUNE 2  
Dt 33:27 NKJV

**WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?**

At times every parent despairs over their child's decisions and actions. "I did my best and raise them right; did I fail as a parent?" Failure is a fact of life—and of parenting—and nobody does it perfectly! Parents assume a heavier load of guilt than they deserve. Consider some Bible examples of real-world parenting: Isaac had, at best, a 50 percent success rate with his sons, Jacob and Esau. Aaron struck out completely with Nadab and Abihu. Manoah's boy Samson didn't win the "son-of-the-year award"! And Samuel, a recognized moral and spiritual giant, watched his sons reject his example and teaching and pursue lives of bribery and shame. Since Adam, kids "doing their own thing" have broken their parents' hearts! So what's a parent to do? (1) *Realize you're not responsible for their decisions.* They make their own choices. Condemning yourself just discourages you, and it undermines your ability to be the parent they need. The Bible says, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jnh 2:9). He saves and delivers—not you. (2) *Pray for them and give them to God.* Anxiety and frustration will only make you the kind of parent they don't enjoy being around, and who can't enjoy them. You're not built to carry such a load; your heavenly Father is, and He wants to carry it for you! (See 1Pe 5:7.) (3) *Remember that God loves them more than you do!* He gave His only child to save yours. He knows their heart, and who to reach it and turn it toward Him (See Jer 17:9-10). So give your child to Him!

**PATRIA POTESTAS**

Paul's audience would have understood his use of Roman adoption law when teaching the benefits we receive as redeemed members of God's family. A Roman father held absolute right and control, legally entitled *patria potestas*, over his children at any age. Roman adoption was a two-step process that transferred children from one *patria potestas* to another. (1) *Emancipation.* This step included a symbolic sale where the natural father twice "sold" and "bought back" his child, and a third where he didn't buy them back, ending his paternal rights. (2) *Vindication.* Here the adoptive father presented his case for adoption to a Roman magistrate, who legally transferred the child to his *patria potestas*. Likewise, we have been transferred from Satan's grip to our heavenly Father's blessed *patria potestas*! The benefits of Roman adoption were Paul's chief focus in Romans chapter eight: (a) The adopted person lost all rights in their old family, but gained a new father and all the rights of a legitimate member of their new family. (b) They became an heir to their new father's estate. When there were other siblings, they became joint-heirs together. (c) All their debts were completely cancelled, legal records of their history were expunged; the past had no effect on their new life. (d) Seven citizens witnessed all legal adoptions. If the adoptee's legitimacy was ever challenged, each witness could testify to their legitimate standing. Thank God, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (v. 16 NIV). No less than the Holy Spirit Himself validates your membership in God's family!

**YOU CAN CARRY GOD'S PRESENCE WITH YOU (1)**

The ark of the covenant represented the presence of God in the midst of His people. When the Philistines captured it, they were smitten with tumors. When they placed it in their temple, their god Dagon fell to the ground (See 1Sa 5). The moral of this story is—don't mess around with the things of God! Even if you are not prepared to serve God, at least be wise and reverence Him.

When Israel conquered the Philistines, David decided to bring the ark, the symbol of God's presence, back home to Jerusalem. Now, when God designed that ark He put rings on the side of it, and poles through those rings, saying it must only be carried on the shoulders of special priests. But somebody thought up "a better way," so they put it on a new cart pulled by an ox. And that's when everything went wrong. When the ark started to slip off the cart, a well-meaning bystander decided to steady it. And he died for it! You say, "That's pretty extreme." There's a lesson here for those who want to package God's presence, market it, and "take it on the road." Who is qualified to carry God's presence? Only believer-priests who have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, are washed by the Word at the laver, who fellowship with God at His table, who worship Him at the altar of incense, and who walk in the light of truth represented by the seven-branded lampstand. Away with newfangled carts! "The Lord added to the church" (Ac 2:47 NKJV). If we are going to carry God's presence and build His church, we've got to do it *His way*.

**YOU CAN CARRY GOD'S PRESENCE WITH YOU (2)**

The ark of the covenant represented three things to the people of Israel. And these are three things you need in your life. Let's look carefully at each:

(1) *Victory.* When Israel went into battle they must have looked strange to their enemies, because the priests who carried the ark of the covenant went ahead of the army. Indeed, when their enemies saw it they may have laughed and said, "What's that all about? What's the big deal with the box?" But after they had been humbled by defeat they realized they weren't fighting man, but God. And when you are in right standing with God He will go before you and fight your battles. And the great thing is, God has never lost a battle. (2) *Guidance.* When the Israelites needed direction, God spoke to them in the place where the ark rested in the tabernacle. And they discovered what you will discover: when you seek God's guidance and listen to Him, you won't get it wrong. His guidance system is infallible: "I am the Lord your God...who directs you in the way you should go." (3) *Prosperity.* Prosperity simply means, "Having enough to do the will of God." And that's how much God wants you to have, no more and no less. When the ark rested for a three-month span in the house of a man called Obed-Edom, all that he had was blessed and multiplied (See 2Sa 6:10-12). Could you use more victory, more guidance, and more prosperity? Spend time in God's presence, and then carry it with you wherever you go.

**YOU CAN CARRY GOD'S PRESENCE WITH YOU (3)**

The ark of the covenant is mentioned in Scripture about 185 times, so it must be important. Every bit of activity in the outer court and inner court of the tabernacle was for one purpose, to lead you into the Holy of Holies where God's presence was. Old Testament symbols, such as the ark, are a picture of New Testament realities. In this regard, the ark, which was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle, is a picture of the Christ we love and serve. He is Lord. He is supreme. There's no one like Him. And He alone is worthy of all praise! Paul writes: "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before everything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself" (vv. 15-20 NLT). If your faith is "me-centered," you'll get nowhere with God. But when your faith is "Christ-centered," then everything Christ has become available to you!

SATURDAY JUNE 8

**"Riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations."**  
**Pr 27:24 NIV**

**WHERE'S YOUR FINANCIAL SECURITY?**

One mega-insurance company advertises itself as "the Rock," claiming to be the foundation of your financial security. Remember when we trusted such slogans? Not anymore; it's not the same world. Financial uncertainty characterizes today's world of failing banks, crumbling investment giants, shrinking multinational corporations, swelling lines of the under-employed and unemployed, plus an epidemic of fear plaguing the hearts of the presently-employed. For the young, the joy of graduation has become the stress of college debts and a shrinking job market. Many older folks are trading in their retirement dreams for a new twenty-first century reality: "work till you drop." In such times, where can we turn? To politicians? To government? To the next get-rich-quick guru? The Bible says, "Riches do not endure forever, and a crown (human government) is not secure for all generations." What's the answer? Turn to the only reliable source of security: God! There's no financial crisis in His kingdom! Israel hungered and thirsted and He sent them fresh manna and water from the rock. He assigned ravens to feed Elijah, multiplied oil and flour to sustain a destitute widow's family, fed thousands from a boy's lunch of five loaves and two fish. And He asks us: "Is anything too difficult for Me?" (Jer 32:27 NAS). No! So: (1) trust God to provide for you; (2) do what He tells you to do; (3) believe that God "will." "The lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field. You will have plenty...to feed you and your family" (Pr 27:26-27 NIV).

**"Let the Spirit renew your...attitudes."****GET RID OF THE "CLUTTER"**

When you sell a house it feels great to get rid of stuff you've accumulated. You wonder why you lived so long with it weighing you down. It's the same with mental and emotional clutter. Jon Gordon says, "We fill our minds with thoughts that hold us back, habits that limit us, distractions that derail us, negative people who drain us, fear that paralyzes us, time-zappers that sabotage our productivity. We spend so much time and energy on things that don't matter—we fail to focus on what does matter. We fill up with so many things that generate negative energy, there's no room for positive energy in our lives." Paul writes, "Throw off your...former way of life...let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes" (v. 22-23 NLT). The clutter you need to lose includes: believing that you're alone, trying to please everybody, feeling insecure, putting yourself down, needing everybody to like you, jumping to negative conclusions before you know the facts, thinking you're always right, recalling all the times you messed up, wanting to know how it all turns out, needing to have all the answers, worrying that if you let go of the memorabilia you'll lose the memories, agonizing that you're not rich enough, good enough or smart enough, surrounding yourself with people who remember the bad times and not the good, making energy-sucking comparisons, viewing life like a movie instead of participating, believing that your best days are over, waiting at all times for the right moment, fearing you will look foolish, focusing on negative type-casting...and anything else you don't want to pass on to your kids. How can you get rid of the clutter? "Let the Spirit renew your...attitudes."

MONDAY JUNE 10

**"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."**  
**Mk 10:43 NIV**

**WORKING IN THE KINGDOM (1)**

Disneyland is referred to as "the Magic Kingdom." For those who work there, one value is emphasized above all others. It's what puts the "magic" into that kingdom. What is it? Servanthood! Employees are told that when you walk through those gates, you serve. You treat every encounter with people as if they were your personal guest. If they need directions, you escort them. If they ask a question you've heard a hundred times, you answer it as if you'd never heard it before. There's a ride called the Jungle Cruise, and the most common question asked about it is, "How long is this ride?" So the staff is given a prepared, standard answer: "The Jungle Cruise is an exciting adventure ride that lasts ten minutes." But one employee had been asked it once too often, so when a couple asked, "How long is the Jungle Cruise?" he said, "Three days." The couple got out of line, went back to the Disney Hotel, packed their suitcases, checked out, and came back to the line at the Jungle Cruise. The next day, that Disneyland employee was gone, and a new employee was saying, "The Jungle Cruise is an exciting adventure ride that lasts ten minutes." When you represent God's kingdom you're supposed to go out of your way to facilitate people, love them and meet their needs. Why? Because Jesus, Who is the King in this kingdom, said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20:28 NIV).

**"To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given."**  
Mt 25:29 NLT

### WORKING IN THE KINGDOM (2)

Your value on the job is determined by the value you add to the job. When a Christian goes to work each day God holds them accountable for adding, enhancing and improving things in their workplace. Jesus told the story of three men who were each given money. One was given five bags of it, another two, and another one. The first two "went and traded with them, and gained" (v. 16 NAS). They showed skill, initiative, and made 100 percent profit. So they were commended by their master. But the third man just punched the clock, called in sick, didn't train, try, dare, or do. So his job review didn't go too well. And Jesus said something that ought to make us all sit up and take notice: "To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away." That means if your attitude and work ethic are poor, you're in trouble with God. So, let's stop and think about your job. If Jesus were your supervisor, would you do your work any differently? How would you answer the phone, type documents, treat your employees, or teach your pupils if Jesus were checking your work? As a citizen of God's kingdom you need to periodically review your attitude on the job, solicit feedback on how you can grow, demonstrate love and grace to those you work with, make your company profitable, and enjoy the work you do.

WEDNESDAY JUNE 12

**"The father [or mother] of a righteous man has great joy."**

Pr 23:24 NIV

### WORKING IN THE KINGDOM (3)

The *hardest* work is sometimes the most *overlooked* work. A husband came home from work one day and the house was an absolute mess. Clothes were strewn all over the floor, dirty dishes filled the sink, the kids were crying, the beds were unmade, the bathrooms smelled bad and the TV set was blaring. When he asked his wife what was going on she replied, "You know how you ask me every night what I did all day? Well, today I didn't do it." If you're a stay-at-home mom or dad, God considers your work to be important. It's more important to the future than just about any other profession—because you're determining the quality of the next generation. Martin Luther said, "What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord." One day God will say, "Well done," to parents who cared for children—bathing them, feeding them, cleaning up after them—when they were tired and thought nobody was looking. Somebody is looking. Somebody is keeping track. It is worth it! You are the one who makes your work significant—not the other way round. When you discover the gifts God has given you and the passions He has placed within you, and put them to work in the service of values you deeply believe in—you are "working for God" in the truest sense. So each day ask God to make your work go well. And try to identify the larger picture in your work that makes it a "calling."

**"A righteous person may fall...but he gets up again."**

Pr 24:16 GWT

### RESPONDING TO FAILURE

You can tell a lot about somebody by how they respond to life. Everybody gets knocked down, but how fast you get up again is what counts. Verla Gillmor says: "Failure teaches us things we can't learn any other way...Treat it as a visitor allowed to deliver unpleasant news, but don't let it take up residence. Remember, *all failures aren't equal*. For example, when a beautiful, talented young woman is first-runner-up in the Miss America Pageant, we say she failed. Yet some people would give their right arm to be named the second most attractive female in a national competition. It's a matter of perspective...[examine] your failures and weigh them according to their importance in the overall scheme of things...I once received a 'D' in college...it's ridiculous, but that sticks in my mind like a pebble in my shoe. Why do I fixate on that and not the fact that it happened the semester I carried nineteen credit hours, worked part-time, got engaged, and spent six weeks in the college health center with mononucleosis? When I put the experience in context, it loses its power to undermine my confidence. *Failure teaches us what's important*. I've a friend who was downsized out of a job...It caught her by surprise because she was good at her work. 'I tended to be full of pride,' she says. 'I got away with it because I was so successful. Losing my job...humbled me. With pride you have no permission to fail. It's a heavy yoke...and I don't wear it any more. I feel lighter in my spirit without the burden of having to be perfect.'"

FRIDAY JUNE 14

**"When you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."**

Heb 10:36 NIV

### "PROMISES, PROMISES!" (1)

Many of us remember singing in church, "Every promise in the Book is mine!" Exciting words—but are they entirely true? If you've prayed for the fulfillment of a Bible promise that didn't materialize, you may have wondered, felt disillusioned, or even stopped trusting. What's true is that every promise in the Book intended for you, is yours! God is committed to keeping every promise He has made (See Mt 24:35). So how can you know which Bible promises are yours? Here are some scriptural guidelines to help you: (1) *Be sure you understand the promise*. God is committed to His Word, not to your interpretation of it. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19 NKJV), His audience completely misunderstood Him, thinking He meant the literal temple when He meant His body. (2) *Walk in the Spirit, not the flesh*. Walking in the Spirit, Peter received divine understanding of Christ's deity. When Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father" (See Mt 16:13-18). Soon afterwards, walking in the flesh, the same man totally misunderstood Jesus and was severely rebuked by Jesus (See vv. 21-23). Why? Because "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God...nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Co 2:14 NKJV). So submit your thoughts to God; pray for His guidance, and in due time you'll get the insight you need.

**H**ere are two more principles for discerning which promises in Scripture are for you: (1) *To understand the context.* No Scripture stands in isolation, but should be read in conjunction with every other Scripture on the same topic. If you isolate "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Php 4:13 NKJV), believing "all things" includes leaping from a twelfth-story window, don't blame God's Word for your unexpected demise! You should also have read the context which says, "I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all [these] things through Christ who strengthens me" (vv. 12-13 NKJV). This Scripture doesn't mean you can do anything you want, but that God will enable you to get through anything you encounter while doing His will. (2) *Test Scripture by Scripture, not by your own desires.* "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." Some Bible promises are *universal* in application, and some are *personal*. The personal ones apply to the intended hearer; the universal ones apply to all believers. Know which is which. If you think the Scripture, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Ac 16:31), guarantees your entire household's salvation, you might be disappointed and think that God failed. No, that was a *personal* promise made and fulfilled to the Philippian jailer. A *universal* word for you and your family is, "In fact, God...wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost" (2Pe 3:9 CEV). He *wants* your entire family to be saved!

**I**n an interview with *Christianity Today*, Dr. James Dobson said: "The culture has totally changed. Girls today are growing up too fast; the influences of the entertainment industry have changed everything. Girls are experiencing things their mothers and grandmothers never experienced. The age of compression thrusts girls into adolescent experience far too early, gets them thinking about sexuality at an early age and creates pressure. We are dealing with evidences of emotional turmoil, including eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia; 90 percent of those with eating disorders are girls, some of them as young as five. Recently a clothing manufacturer finally took this product off the shelves: bikinis with padded bras for seven-year-olds! You also have cutting, piercing, and sexual aggression among elementary school age kids and early involvement in drugs and alcohol. Girls have now reached parity with boys in binge drinking, and there's a high level of violence among girls. One out of three boys and girls is either a victim or a perpetrator of bullying. We've seen news recently about girls who hang themselves after being taunted. There has never been an easy time to raise kids, but it's harder today." Parent, if living in your dream home and climbing the ladder of success means losing your children, you'll regret it. You've only one chance to get it right. "These commandments that I give you today...impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (vv. 6-7 NIV).

**W**hen asked, "How do you teach your daughter about healthy self-esteem while not training her to be self-focused?" Dr. Dobson gave this answer: "Girls in their adolescent and middle school years are going through puberty, and that brings about acne and gangly bodies. Those girls look at role models like Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan. If they dare to be a little overweight—not even fat, but slightly overweight—they hear about it all day long. It tears into the heart and worth of a girl who just wants to be a princess, who wants to be loved by somebody. If the father in this situation doesn't affirm her, love her, tell her she's pretty, put his arm around her and give her attention, she often looks for it elsewhere. The only thing she has to bargain with is her sexuality, and she thinks she'll be loved if she gives certain gifts of her sexuality. We know where that leads: *he* gets what he wants and dumps her, and she doesn't get what she wants, which is love." Dad, if you've been AWOL, come back to your children, particularly your daughters. Your home is a classroom. What you teach them there, they will take with them into the rest of their lives. If your life is out of order today, repent, get right with God and start paying attention to what really matters. You can't undo the past, but with God's help you can give your children the future they deserve. But it must become one of your highest priorities.

**W**hen asked, "How do you suggest parents handle their children's activities on web sites like Facebook and Twitter?" Dr. Dobson gave this advice: "Parents have to know what technology their kids are using. Sexting is a terrible thing. ('Sexting' is the new term for children exposing themselves to one another online, thinking they are safe because they are in the sanctuary of their own home.) Pornography is pervasive, and parents need to keep up with changes in technology and protect their kids. That's a tough assignment, because kids are ahead of them. Parents often have extremely demanding careers and when they come home they have nothing left to give, so the culture will often take your kids to hell." One night a father and his daughter were out on a lake when their small boat was caught in a storm. As he rowed, Dad kept saying to his daughter, "Can you see the shore? Can you see the shore?" After a terrifying hour the little girl pointed over her dad's shoulder and said, "Yes, I see the light. Momma said if we were out after dark she would hang a light in the window." When they finally got home a tearful mother hugged her husband and daughter, and thanked God for their safe return. Looking at her, the little girl said, "Momma, you never had to worry. We steered by your light!" Parent, your children are being caught in life's storms. They are rowing in the dark with no sense of direction. Live for God, and give them a light they can steer by!



**"That the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Mt 26:56 NIV****TRUST YOUR BIBLE. IT'S TRUE!**

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled no less than twenty-nine different Old Testament prophecies. The odds of that happening are virtually impossible! Mathematician Peter Stoner explains it this way: "If you were to cover the state of Texas two feet deep in silver dollars, then on one, place a mark. What is the probability that a blindfolded person could, on their first attempt, select that dollar? That's the likelihood of just *eight* prophecies being fulfilled in one lifetime. And Jesus fulfilled *twenty-nine* of them in one day!" Let's look at some of the prophecies He fulfilled: (1) "They pierced My hands and... feet" (Ps 22:16 NKJV). (2) "They divide my garments...and...cast lots" (Ps 22:18 NKJV). (3) "In that day...I will make the sun go down at noon, and...darken the earth in...daylight" (Am 8:9 NKJV). Jesus predicted both His death and His resurrection. He told His critics, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days...the temple he had spoken of was his body" (Jn 2:19-21 NIV). Jesus orchestrated every event, including Judas' betrayal, the high priest's hypocrisy, and Peter's denial. Why? "That the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." So you can trust your Bible because it's true. And something else is true too. God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20 NIV). Note the words "immeasurably more." What seems impossible to you at the moment, is all in a day's work for Him. So start trusting Him to work on your behalf.

THURSDAY JUNE 20

**"Help us for the glory of your name."****Ps 79:9 NLT****FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL ADDICTION**

For fifteen years Mike Cleveland, airline pilot and founder of "Setting Captives Free," seemed powerless as his addiction to online pornography devastated his life, his marriage and his family. The spiral of lust enslaved him "until there wasn't a moment of his days free from its tortured domination." The cycle of prayers for deliverance, followed by repeated indulgence in porn, XXX DVDs and sex chat-rooms, plunged him deeper into the darkness of despair and self-loathing. He longed to escape the slimy, secluded under-world of secret soul-destroying sin, but every pathetic attempt left him unchanged, unhinged, and uncertain that freedom was possible for him. Mike turned to self-help books, counselors and friends without success. His repeated disappointment, when every effort failed, led to increasing guilt and self-incrimination. When his wife insisted on a last-ditch visit with her pastor (all other remedies had been exhausted), the lights in their bleak prison cell suddenly came on. Mike learned that "deliverance belong(s) to the Lord" (Jnh 2:9 AMP), and its rules are all dictated by Him. Mike's old motivations for getting clean—"saving my marriage for my kids' sake; I'm a Christian, a seminary graduate and preacher"—were full of "loopholes and escape clauses" and produced one botched disaster after another. His pastor taught him that the only viable motivation for getting clean and staying clean was a commitment to glorifying God in all of his decisions, because God delivers the powerless, "For the glory of His name." When Mike learned, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Co 10:31 NIV), the doors to freedom from years of sexual addiction began to open. Yours can too!

**ARE YOU ENJOYING THIS DEVOTIONAL?****WHY NOT GET ONE FOR A FRIEND?**

FRIDAY JUNE 21

**Mt 4:3 NKJV****"Command that these stones become bread."****THREE LEVELS OF ATTACK (1)**

The Bible says, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (v. 1 NKJV). This seems to be God's standard operating procedure. Why? Because He's a good general; before He puts you into battle He puts you into boot camp. Imagine it: you're up at dawn, running for miles with a heavy backpack, crawling under barbed wire barriers with bullets whizzing over your head, taking orders from authority figures you don't know and probably don't like. But if you pass the test you get to wear the uniform. On the threshold of His ministry, God led His Son into a situation where He would face three levels of attack. You will face them also. Let's look at the first one:

*The attack over the bread.* Did Jesus need bread? Yes, He'd been without food for forty days. But He knew that His greatest need was not for natural food but spiritual food. So He told Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (v. 4 NKJV). Only when you're convinced God will take care of all your material needs, will you start putting spiritual things first in your life. Until that happens, you'll think you have to take care of yourself. As a result, you will walk in fear and not faith. That's not how God wants you to live. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33 NKJV). When you worry, you don't trust God. When you trust God, you don't have to worry. The choice is yours.

**"Then the devil...set Him on the pinnacle."****Mt 4:5 NKJV**THREE LEVELS OF ATTACK (2)

**T**he attack on the pinnacle. Let's look at the second temptation Jesus faced: "Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, [and] set Him on the pinnacle of the temple." Here you deal with the fear of failure. Satan will whisper, "You're on the pinnacle of success now, but you could easily fall off." He will bring up your past failures. He will remind you of leaders who crashed and burned. He will say, "If people realized how little you really know, or the issues you're struggling with, they wouldn't respect you." There are two kinds of fear: healthy fear and unhealthy fear. Healthy fear will keep you dependent on God; it will protect you from pride and self-sufficiency. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Co 10:12 NKJV). But there's an unhealthy fear that will keep you in the boat when Jesus is calling to you to step out and walk with Him on the water. You say, "But Peter almost drowned." Sure, but he was the only one of the disciples who experienced the joy of walking on the water! Having faith doesn't mean you won't experience a sinking feeling at times. You have a choice. You can give in to fear, or trust the God who has called you, sustained you, and never failed to give you the strength needed to cope with whatever you face. If your own intellect or talents are the basis of your confidence, you have good reason to fear. But if God is the basis of your confidence, you have nothing to fear.

SUNDAY JUNE 23

**"All these things I will give you."****Mt 4:8 NKJV**THREE LEVELS OF ATTACK (3)

**T**he attack over the cross. Let's look at the third temptation Jesus faced: "The devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me'" (vv. 8-9 NKJV). Satan's third attack was over a cross-less life. In essence, he told Jesus, "You don't have to carry the cross. Just bow to me and you can have it all." Jesus said, "Away with you, Satan!" (v. 10 NKJV). "Away" with any teaching that says God is your bellhop and He has to wait on you! Or that He's like a vending machine; all you have to do is put in a few coins and out will come whatever you want.

Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20 NKJV). Has God promised to bless you? Absolutely! But that doesn't mean you'll never get hurt, or face lack, or battle sickness, or be betrayed and disappointed by others. Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies [to self], it remains alone; but if it dies [to self], it produces much" (Jn 12:24 NKJV). Have you ever heard the expression, "Dead man walking?" To do God's will you have to die to your own will, and do it daily. But if you're willing to, God will take you to a new level of blessing.

*As you read this daily devotional, ask God, "What are you saying to me?"  
You'll be blessed with fresh insights every day.*

**"Have your sandals on and your walking stick in your hand."****Ex 12:11 NCV**WELCOME THIS CHANGE

**T**he Boy Scout motto is "Be prepared," and it's a good one. In Exodus God told Israel, "Eat...fully dressed as if you were going on a trip...have your sandals on and your walking stick in your hand." In other words, "Be ready when I tell you to move!" Maybe there's an area in your life where God is telling you it's time to move, but fear is making you shrink back. Don't! Change is just evidence of growth. What worked yesterday can be tomorrow's recipe for failure. You can't become who you are destined to be, if you insist on staying as you are. John Patterson said, "Only fools and dead men don't change...Fools won't, and dead men can't." Change isn't the enemy. Once you start seeing yourself as a lifelong learner looking for ways to grow and improve, change becomes your friend. Learn from the people you meet, pursue new ideas, strategies, and ways to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Jim Penner says: "Our bodies change no matter how hard we exercise...Our homes change as our needs ebb and flow. Our places of employment change as the winds of economic forces blow and new opportunities come...friendships change as family needs and employment pull us away...While many changes become enjoyable new seasons...sometimes they're painful. But no matter what season of change you're experiencing...you can find comfort in Malachi 3:6, 'I am God...I haven't changed' (TM). His mercies endure forever...and it's an awesome feeling knowing He loves and directs you just like He directed all His people who came before you."

TUESDAY JUNE 25

**"They that wait upon the Lord."****Isa 40:31**LEARN TO WAIT

**T**he word "wait" gives us a picture of two things. The first is of a waiter at your table attending to your needs. The second is of a lower-level person making a request of a higher-level one. Your success depends on approaching them the right way, and on their willingness to grant your request. Since they hold the power, you must be patient and wait for them. Are you getting the idea? Our problem is twofold. First, we want God to wait on us, instead of the other way around. Second, we don't want to wait for anything! We drive to work listening to the radio and talking on the phone; some of us even put ourselves and others at risk by text-messaging. Vance Havner points out that in the Old West if someone missed a stagecoach they said, "That's okay, another one will come around in three or four weeks. Now we don't even want to wait for a revolving door." What God does in you while you are waiting is often more important than *what* you're asking God to do. Waiting on God brings rewards that nothing else will. Here are a few of them: (1) *Vindication*. "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong...Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:1,4 NKJV). (2) *Strength*. "Wait on the Lord...and He shall strengthen your heart" (Ps 27:14 NKJV). (3) *Deliverance*. "I...waited for God...He lifted me out of the ditch" (Ps 40:1-2 TM). So relax, wait on God and He will come through for you.

**"I...am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior." Isa 43:11 NKJV**

**THERE'S NOBODY LIKE HIM! (1)**

The Israelites were commanded not to make any "graven image" of God. Why? Because God made us, we didn't make Him. A god you can make is a god you can control and make do whatever you wish. The ancient Greeks had a host of gods, all created by men. Some demanded human sacrifice; others permitted prostitution, and even promoted it in their temples. When we reverse the order and start to create God in our own image (according to our own imagination) we get the following things: (1) A god who's liberal or conservative, a hawk or a dove; a god politicians conveniently pull out of a box at election time to garner votes even though they don't truly serve Him. (2) A flexible god who permits you to do whatever you want, and you can then say, "I just felt led to do it." (3) A god who promises to bless his children but never discipline them. (4) A god you can "keep in his place" until you need him. (5) A god who is not supreme, but happy to be one of many deities offering many ways to heaven. Not so! God says, "I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6 NKJV). Jesus doesn't need a makeover to bring Him into alignment with the Internet and the space age. He is Lord! Indeed, if He is not Lord over all, He is not Lord at all!

THURSDAY JUNE 27

**"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Pr 9:10 NKJV**

**THERE'S NOBODY LIKE HIM! (2)**

In a world out of control, we like a god we can control: a comforting presence who blesses, provides, and advises. Kind of like "God in a box." But when it comes to Christ, no box works. His contemporaries designed an assortment of boxes for Him, but He never fit in any of the boxes. They called Him a revolutionary, but He paid taxes. They labeled Him a country carpenter, but He confounded scholars. They came to see His miracles, but He refused to entertain them. He was a Jew who attracted Gentiles, a rabbi who gave up on synagogues, a holy man who hung out with streetwalkers. In a male-dominated society, He recruited females. In an anti-Roman culture, He opted not to denounce Rome. He talked like a king yet lived like a pilgrim. People tried to put Him in a "box," but they couldn't. And we can't either; indeed we *must* not! "Skilled living gets its start in the Fear-of-God, insight into life from knowing a Holy God" (v. 10 TM). Most of our fears are unhealthy. They rob us of peace and joy. But the fear of the Lord does the opposite. One author writes: "There is nothing neurotic about fearing God. The neurotic thing is *not* to be afraid, or to be afraid of the wrong thing. That is why God chooses to be known to us, so that we may stop being afraid of the wrong thing. When God is fully revealed to us and we 'get it,' then we experience the conversion of our fear... 'fear of the Lord' is the deeply sane recognition that we are not God."

*Our young men and women serving overseas are now reading this devotional.  
Have a loved one in the Armed Services?  
Send them a copy!*

**"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"**

**Mt 17:5 NKJV**

**THERE'S NOBODY LIKE HIM! (3)**

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses, the law giver, and Elijah, who represents the prophets, stood side by side with Jesus. But Jesus outshone them all. The Bible says, "His clothes shimmered, glistening white, whiter than any bleach could make them" (Mk 9:3 TM). In that moment Jesus was God in His purest form. Awed by Him, Peter said, "Lord...if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Mt 17:4 NKJV). It was a sincere sentiment, but it was sincerely wrong. "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" The word *beloved* implies "unique." There is no one else like Jesus! Not Moses. Not Elijah. Not Peter. Not Zoroaster, Buddha, or Muhammad. No one in heaven or on earth. Three shrines would have made Moses and Elijah equal with Christ, and God would have none of it. Only one shrine should be built, because only one person on the mountain deserved to be worshipped. "When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid" (Mt 17:6 NKJV). The One who hung the stars in space and left Pharaoh dead at the bottom of the Red Sea stood among them. The sight of Him took their breath away, removed every trace of arrogance and caused them to finish up face-down on the ground. How long has it been since you felt such reverence for God?

SATURDAY JUNE 29

**"Let all that I am praise the Lord."**

**Ps 103:2 NLT**

**THERE'S NOBODY LIKE HIM! (4)**

The Bible equates God with light, and light with holiness. "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1Jn 1:5 NIV). Paul said that God dwells in "unapproachable light" (1Ti 6:16 NIV). Scripture refers to Christ "who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners" (Heb 7:26 NIV). So how should you approach such a God? As you would an auditor when your books don't balance? Or a dictator who holds the power of life and death? No, Jesus told us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Mt 6:9). There's your answer! You must come to God as a father who loves you dearly and desires only what is best for you, while always regarding Him with profound reverence. As your awe of God expands, your fears in life will diminish. A big view of God translates into big courage; a small view of God generates no courage at all. A puny God can't help you when cancer strikes, your family is in trouble, or you've no way to pay your bills. A "do-me-a-favor" Jesus may look good stuck on your dashboard, but that image can do nothing for your fears. You need an awesome God, who, while diminishing your ego, enlarges your faith and blows your mind. David wrote: "Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things" (Ps 103:2-5 NLT).

**THERE'S NOBODY LIKE HIM! (5)**

**W**e all need an encounter with the transfigured Christ; the One Who is greater than Moses the law giver and Elijah the prophet, and all the other prophets who have ever lived. The One who wears the true crown of the universe, God's beloved Son. We need to fall on our face and see Him as the Holy One, the Highest One, the Only One. As you do, all your fears, save the fear of Christ Himself, will melt like an ice cube on a summer day. You will agree with David: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" In the book *Prince Caspian*, there is a great illustration of this. Lucy sees Aslan the lion for the first time in many years. He has changed since their last encounter. His size surprises her, and she tells him as much. "Aslan," says Lucy, "you're bigger." He replies, "That is because you are older, little one." Lucy says, "Not because you are?" He replies, "I am not. But every year you grow, you find me bigger." And so it is in our walk with Christ. The longer we serve Him, the greater He becomes. It's not that *He* changes, but that *we* do. We see dimensions, aspects, characteristics we never saw before; increasing and astonishing increments of His purity, power, and uniqueness. Only when we have fallen at His feet in humility and total dependence will He say to us what He said to His disciples on the Mount where He was transfigured: "Arise, and do not be afraid" (Mt 17:7 NKJV).

MONDAY JULY 1

**"I have glorified You on the earth."****Jn 17:4 NKJV****WHAT IS 'SUCCESS' FOR YOU?**

**A**t the end of His life Jesus was able to pray, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." Jesus didn't try to compete with John the Baptist or pattern Himself after some Old Testament prophet. He knew what "success" was for Him. To know what it is for you, you must:

(1) *Discern what success really is.* When others feel good about you, you're popular; but when you feel good about yourself, you're successful. Your life's highest calling will always create the highest level of joy within you. (2) *Before you set goals, pray.* "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Pr 3:6 NKJV). It's not wrong to set goals, it's just wrong to set them without first consulting God. (3) *Stop expecting others to bring you success.* Don't wait for flowers to arrive. God gave you seed; start growing some of your own. "Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else" (Gal 6:4 NLT). And besides, when you're less needy you'll become more attractive to others. (4) *Get over yourself—everyone else has.* A minister said he was praying one day, "Father, why does the Devil keep reminding me of my past?" God replied, "Because he's running low on material!" Repent, and then move on. God says He will "not remember your sins" (Isa 43:25 NKJV). There's only one good reason to bring up the past, and that's to learn from it and grow wiser.

*We know you'll be blessed as you make this devotional a daily habit!*

**"Blessed is the man who perseveres."****VICTORIOUS LIVING**

**H**ere are three keys to victorious living: (1) *Perseverance.* Dr. G. Campbell Morgan tells of a man whose shop burned to the ground. The next morning he set up shop in the middle of the charred ruins and put up a sign that read, "Everything lost except wife, children and hope—business as usual tomorrow morning." So get back up again! "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life." (2) *Purpose.* Helen Keller wrote, "Many persons have the wrong idea about what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose." Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45 NKJV). Don't pray for a generous heart, practice being generous and your heart will fall into line with your actions. As long as you are a sower, God will give you seed (See 2Co 9:10). (3) *Perspective.* Your disappointment may turn out to be God's appointment. "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (See Pr 16:9). Remember how an oyster makes a pearl? When a grain of sand gets into its shell, the oyster wraps it in layer after layer of beauty until a pearl is formed. The poet wrote: "This tale has a moral, for isn't it grand, what an oyster can do with a morsel of sand? And what couldn't we do, if we'd only begin, with some of the things that get under our skin." Get the right perspective. Try to see "God" at work in what you are going through today!

WEDNESDAY JULY 3

**Mt 5:13 NKJV****"You are the salt of the earth."****TAKE GOD TO WORK WITH YOU**

**J**on Gordon says: "I speak to a lot of organizations on the importance of positive leadership and the benefits of building a positive culture that fuels performance. Yet the most common question I receive is, 'How do I stay positive when my boss isn't?' Here are a few suggestions: Even though you're not the leader...focus on being the best and bringing out the best in the people you work with...tune out negativity and negative comments. Remember, you can't control what other people say and do, but you can control how you react. Dr. David Hawkins says, 'Eighty percent of the population vibrates to a negative frequency. It's all around us. Stay above the fray.' There's an old adage, 'Never wrestle with a pig because you'll both get dirty—and the pig will enjoy himself!' Jesus said, 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.' Make up your mind to be the beacon that shines in your workplace. Bottom line: most people don't enjoy being negative. Many times they're that way because of stress, busyness and fear. Most of them just need a wake-up call to break out of their rut, and contrary to what you may think, you can be that instrument of change. Jesus also said, 'You are the salt of the earth,' and salt has two functions. It stops things from going bad, and it adds taste and flavor. Your job as a Christian is to preserve, reconcile, and give hope to those around you, including the people you work with every day." So, take God to work with you.

**"If My people...will humble themselves, and pray...I will hear."****2Ch 7:14 NKJV****PRAY FOR OUR NATION**

In August 1984, President Ronald Reagan spoke at the national prayer breakfast in Dallas and stated: "We poison our society when we remove its theological underpinnings. We court corruption when we leave it bereft of belief. All are free to believe or not believe; all are free to practice faith or not. But those who believe must be free to speak of and act on their belief, to apply moral teaching to public questions. I submit to you that the tolerant society is open to and encouraging of all religions. And this does not weaken us; it strengthens us...without God, there is no virtue, because there's no prompting of the conscience. Without God, we're mired in the material, that flat world that tells us only what the senses perceive. Without God, there is a coarsening of the society. And without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure. If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under." When Abraham prayed on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, God told him that He would spare those cities if only fifty righteous people could be found. Sadly, ten righteous people couldn't be found, much less fifty, so the cities were destroyed. But there's hope in this story—a righteous minority can move God, bring revival, and save our nation! "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

FRIDAY JULY 5

**"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."****Ps 107:2****LET'S "SAY SO"**

In his first inaugural address, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the thirty-second president of the United States, proclaimed to the nation: "First of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance...In such a spirit on my part and on yours, we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things...Practices of the unscrupulous moneychangers who stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men...who know only the rules of a generation of self seekers. They have no vision, and 'where there is no vision the people perish' [Pr 29:18]. The moneychangers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths...We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values...In this dedication of a nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us! May He guide me in the days to come." The Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." Let us refuse to allow political correctness or the fear of ridicule to silence us, or tempt us to hide our convictions. Let us remember that, both personally and as a nation, every benefit and bounty we enjoy is given to us by God. And neither we nor our children must ever forget that.

**Hag 1:6 NKJV****"He...earns wages to put into a bag with holes."****FOUR KINDS OF GIVERS (1)**

There are four kinds of givers noted in the Bible. For the next few days let's look at each. **Bag people.** In the days of Haggai the prophet, the Israelites were so busy making money that they had no time for God. Sound familiar? So He said to them: "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?...Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little...and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes...You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of Hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house" (Hag 1:4-9 NKJV). If you want God to be interested in your house, be interested in His house. If you want God to bless your house, begin to bless His house. If you want God to provide for your house, start providing for His house. You say, "How much should I give?" God sets the baseline at one-tenth of your income (See Mal 3:10). Whatever you give beyond that will be determined by three things: (a) Your ability. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you" (Dt 16:17 NKJV). (b) Your desire to reap. God will "multiply the seed that you have sown" (2Co 9:10 NKJV). (c) Your love. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37 NKJV).

SUNDAY JULY 7

**1Ki 17:14 NKJV****"The bin...shall not be used up."****FOUR KINDS OF GIVERS (2)**

**Bin people.** In the middle of a devastating famine God sent the prophet Elijah to Zarephath, saying he'd meet a widow there who would feed him. Why did God not send Elijah to a wealthy family? Because they didn't need a miracle, she did! When Elijah asked this woman for something to eat she told him that she'd "only a handful of flour in a bin" (v. 12 NKJV). She had just enough for one more meal, then she and her son would die. Perhaps you're thinking, "Typical preacher! They'll take the last bite out of your mouth and the last penny out of your pocket." No, this was the best day of her life! She was about to step into miracle territory. But first she had to overcome the fear of giving. "Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear...make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me...For thus says the Lord God of Israel: The bin of flour shall not be used up...until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth'" (vv. 13-14 NKJV). How does this story turn out? "So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and...The bin of flour was not used up" (vv. 15-16 NKJV). Day after day, without fail, she reached into the bin and found more flour. She discovered that when you obey God's Word He will meet your every need. Are you a bin person? Are you afraid of letting go of what you have in case you don't have enough? Don't be. You will never out-give God! Whatever you give to Him, He has promised to give back "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over" (Lk 6:38).

*Don't keep this devotional to yourself...get one for a friend.*

**"They took up twelve baskets full."**

Mk 6:43 NKJV

FOUR KINDS OF GIVERS (3)

**B**asket people. A boy gave his lunch to Jesus and He used it to feed five thousand people. Afterward, "They took up twelve baskets full of the fragments." Basket people find a need greater than their own and say, "Lord, here's what I have; take it, bless it and use it." What a contrast this boy was to the disciples. Notice: (1) *They tried to escape the problem.* "Send them away, that they may go...and buy themselves bread" (v. 36 NKJV). Your faith only grows by facing your problems and looking to God for answers. Indeed, when you solve the problem you position yourself to receive what God has in store for you next. (2) *They didn't know what they had.* Jesus said, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (v. 38 NKJV). Moses had a rod, but it parted the Red Sea. David had a slingshot, but it brought down a giant. You may not know it, but God has given you the answer. He's given you something capable of multiplying once you put it into His hands. The key is, "Go and see." (3) *They despised the day of small things.* "There is a lad here who has five bare loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" (Jn 6:9 NKJV). Instead of looking at your lack, look at God's abundance and His willingness to work on your behalf. "Do not despise this small beginning, for the eyes of the Lord rejoice to see the work begin" (Zec 4:10 TLB). Factor God into the equation. The formula for success is you—plus God!

TUESDAY JULY 9

**"Joseph opened the storehouses [barns] and sold grain to the Egyptians."**  
Ge 41:56 NIVFOUR KINDS OF GIVERS (4)

**B**arn people. God used Joseph to feed the nations during a time of worldwide famine. When Pharaoh's advisers couldn't interpret his dream, Joseph did. He actually gave Pharaoh a plan that would not only feed Egypt during seven years of famine, but also feed the world and cause Pharaoh to come out of this crisis a richer man. When you serve God He can give you information about the future. He can give you not only the wisdom to survive, but thrive when you're in a recession. But you can't build such a relationship with God overnight! Joseph's journey to the throne of Egypt led him through years of delay, detours and discouragement. He experienced betrayal at the hands of his family, temptation and slander at the hands of his employer's wife, false imprisonment, years of waiting and wondering when God would fulfill His promise to make him a leader. But he never doubted God. And you must not either! If God can take an ex-con like Joseph and make him the prime minister of Egypt, no obstacle and no enemy can keep Him from fulfilling His promise to you.

So, if you're a *bag person*, "consider your ways" and start putting God first in your finances. If you're a *bin person*, "be not afraid," give, and God will give back to you. If you're a *basket person*, place what you've got into God's hands and watch Him multiply it. If you're a *barn person* with a heart that longs to meet the needs of a hurting world, nothing your enemies do will stop you.

**"The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!"**

1Ki 21:3 NKJV

DON'T SELL OUT

**T**he Bible says: "Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard...next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money.' But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!'" (vv. 1-3 NKJV). Standing by his "inheritance" cost this man of integrity his life. Today the faith of our fathers is coming under increasing attack from the schoolroom to the boardroom. Scriptural principles which have guided us for generations are being challenged and undermined by the Ahab's of this world who sit in places of power. The Bible predicted it and told us to be alert, but not afraid. God said to the end-age church, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10 NKJV). Naboth refused to sell out for money. He refused to sell out for that which looked "bigger and better." He refused to sell out in order to win the favor of those in high places. And he is an example to you. So stand squarely on God's Word and refuse to budge. Gather up your children in faith's arms and declare, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Jos 24:15).

THURSDAY JULY 11

**"Mind your own business; do your own job."**

1Th 4:11 TM

AVOID TRIANGLES

**W**e're not very good at knowing the difference between helpfulness and interference! Suppose two people we care about are in conflict, and we think we can solve their problems. Ultimately, we discover we're in over our heads. Looking back, we say, "I'll never do that again"—until the next time! Here are some healthy relationship boundaries. Sometimes when two people are at odds with each other they "triangle in" a third person to focus on, attempting to lower their stress. Whoever they "triangle in" gets caught in the middle, becomes enmeshed in their unresolved issues, and ultimately becomes their shock absorber. Unfortunately, when that person's rescue attempt backfires they become part of the problem, keeping the issues and themselves stuck. So what should you do? (1) *Unless God puts you in the middle, stay out!* The Bible says, "Mind your own business; do your own job." If your name's not on it, don't pick it up! Try saying, "I care about you both too much to complicate things with unqualified advice. I'll pray that God gives you the wisdom to do what's right for each other." (2) *Maintain a caring relationship with both people.* Relationship specialist Edwin Friedman says, "The way to bring change to the relationship of two others is to maintain a well-defined relationship with each, and avoid taking responsibility for their relationship." Don't take sides. Don't let them pull you in. If they try, remind them that you're praying and trusting God to help them resolve the problem, and that you're confident He will do it.

**A NEW ATTITUDE**

**F**or things to change for the better, you must "change the way you think." For example:

(a) View setbacks as detours, not dead ends. Winners don't just *face* adversity; they *embrace* it, knowing it leads to future success. (b) Tune out the critics and focus on doing your best. Anybody who accomplishes anything worthwhile has to overcome naysayers. (c) When you're afraid, praise God until your faith rebuilds. It may take a while, but praise and thanksgiving never fail, and will give you the strength to go on. (d) When you fail, look for the lesson and remember all the times you've succeeded. Weed out self-doubt and replace it with scriptural self-talk. (e) When you're heading into battle, visualize yourself winning in God's strength—with Him "all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). (f) Instead of focusing on the past and worrying about the future, focus on the *now*—that's where your influence is greatest. Remember, God said, "As your days, so shall your strength be" (De 33:25 NKJV). (g) Instead of complaining, work on identifying solutions, and more will come to you. (h) When you're distracted, focus on your breathing, take a walk and clear your mind, think on what you *can* control, and surrender the rest to God. (i) When you're lonely, remember the people who've helped you this far and who love and support you. (j) When you're fatigued, take time to rest—but never ever give up! Finish strong in everything you do. (k) When you're under pressure and under scrutiny, smile and have fun. You only live once. Life is short... so seize the moment!

SATURDAY JULY 13

**"Let there be no strife between you and me."****Ge 13:8 NAS****WHEN CONFLICT COMES HOME (1)**

**T**he conflict between Abram and Lot teaches us important principles about our families.

Lot had lived peacefully in his Uncle Abram's home. Abram had taken him along on the journey of faith, when suddenly conflict arose. And because conflict reveals character, Lot showed his true colors. Since their growing herds were too big to share the same pastures, Abram suggested they split the land between them, offering Lot first choice. Lot "chose for himself" the best land, leaving the rest to his uncle (v. 11 NAS). Lot moved to rich, sinful Sodom; Abram built an altar to the Lord. Same genes—totally different values! So: (1) *Consider the facts.* Abram was God's appointed leader and Israel's primary patriarch. God had promised him a homeland, fatherhood of a great nation, blessing and protection. And above all these, God promised that in him, "all the families of the earth will be blessed!" (Ge 12:3 NAS). In practical, day-to-day terms, Abram was the senior partner and major stockholder in the family business. He had shown love and generosity to his nephew, and in the crunch, valued their relationship over personal interests. Abram, therefore, deserved consideration and deference from his nephew. But Lot never gave it to him. (2) *Consider the point.* For the family's sake, Abram chose not to "pull rank," or "insist on his rights," or "show who's boss." He proved that God alone vindicates us! We shouldn't even attempt to vindicate ourselves. Abram chose grace over law, humility over pride, self-denial over "rights," mercy over justice, love over lust, and character over popular opinion. Think about it!

**"Let there be no strife between you and me...for we are brothers."****Ge 13:8 NAS****WHEN CONFLICT COMES HOME (2)**

**F**amily conflict brings out the worst and the best in all of us. But conflict itself isn't the problem—character is! Conflict just reveals what's important to us. Abram's priority was the family; Lot's was "getting rich." Abram's concern was harmony; Lot's was self-preservation. Abram was driven by his faith; Lot by his greed. Abram was a giver; Lot was a taker. But watch how the story turned out. (1) *What should have happened?* The junior partner should have submitted to the senior; the follower should have deferred to the leader; the less-spiritual should have acknowledged the more-spiritual. But Lot failed on all counts! (2) *What could have happened?* As the God-appointed leader Abram could have assumed top dog status and enforced his will, but didn't. He could have been concerned about winning, but wasn't. He could have called in his debts with Lot, but refused to. (3) *What did happen?* First, Abram elevated relationship above personal advantage. Second, he relinquished his "rights" to keep peace in the family. Third, he "turned the other cheek" and deferred to Lot. The greater gave way to the lesser. The stronger made allowance for the weaker. The mature showed mercy toward the immature. Did it make Abram the weaker man and Lot the stronger? Did Abram lose and Lot win? No! God always has the last word. And it was this: "Look...northward and southward and eastward and westward...all the land which you see. I will give it to you and to your descendants forever" (vv. 14-15 NAS). Doing things God's way is the sure road to peace and prosperity.

MONDAY JULY 15

**"I have set before you life and death...choose life."****Dt 30:19****TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE**

**C**hoice is the greatest power God gave you. Too many of us just accept our lives—we don't become leaders of ourselves. As a result, we can't get out of our own way. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel wrote in *Souls On Fire* that when you die and go to meet your Maker, you're not going to be asked why you didn't become a Messiah or find a cure for cancer. All you're going to be asked is, "Why didn't you become *you*? Why didn't you become all that you are?" Fulfilling God's will for your life requires taking responsibility for yourself and your life. How do you do that? By saying yes to God first—then to yourself. Every time you say yes, you open yourself up to your God-given potential and to the greatest of possibilities. If you're used to saying no, you may find this difficult. If that is true in your case, then at least be willing to say "maybe." One day a father whose child was chronically ill asked Jesus to heal him. "Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' (Mk 9:23-24 NKJV). If you're a self-doubter, pray that same prayer. God will answer it. Never forget that you are unique, possessing talents, experiences and opportunities that no one else has ever had—or ever will have. You're responsible to become all God made you to be, not only for your own benefit but for everyone else's.

**"You must build...according to the pattern I will show you."****Ex 25:9 NLT****BEFORE YOU BUILD (1)**

**G**o to God for the plan. God told Moses: "You must build this tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you." God knows what you will need in the future, you don't. He prepared Noah a hundred years in advance of the flood. He prepared Joseph to feed Egypt seven years in advance of the famine. Without God's guidance the best you'll ever have are estimates, educated guesswork and projections. "To the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, the glory of the Lord appeared at the summit like a consuming fire. Then Moses disappeared into the cloud as he climbed higher up the mountain. He remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights" (Ex 24:17-18 NLT). Moses spent over a month waiting in God's presence for direction. Why? Because what he was building had to meet the needs of God's people for generations. So go to the place of prayer. Tell those around you, "I'm not coming back till I hear from God and get *His* plan!" When God orders it, He pays for it. But when He doesn't give the order, and you decide to do it anyway, you're on your own! Why? Because you won't have confidence to go to Him in your time of need. Unless you start right, you won't finish right. You say, "But I'm nobody special. Why would God speak to someone like me?" If God has called you, and He has, then you're special. His promise is, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God...and it will be given to him" (Jas 1:5 NIV).

**"Show me now Your way, that I may know You and...find grace."****Ex 33:13 NKJV****BEFORE YOU BUILD (2)**

**G**et to know the people. No minister has ever had so much trouble with a congregation as Moses had with the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. At the Red Sea, he was so happy that he wrote a song to celebrate their spectacular victory. But later, when the complaints were coming at him from every direction, he told God he wanted to die. It reminds us of one pastor who asked another, "How many active members do you have in your church?" The other replied, "Five hundred. Half of them are actively working for me, the other half are actively working against me." Pastors, different people in your churches will play different roles in the plan God has given you. Some of the people you will like, some you won't. But you've been called to lead them all, so get to know them. On his deathbed, Jacob prophesied over each of his twelve sons describing both their *nature* and their *future*. He said Reuben was unruly, Simeon and Levi were given to anger, Judah was born for leadership, Zebulun would extend his borders, Issachar was willing to carry the load, Dan was sharp when it came to dealing with people, Gad was a fighter who wouldn't retreat, Asher loved cooking, Naphtali loved raising children, Joseph would be wounded but he would come back stronger than ever, and Benjamin would be an entrepreneur who knew how to excel in business (See Ge 49). To lead people successfully you must *know* them. So pray, "Show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight."

**Ac 15:28 NKJV****BEFORE YOU BUILD (3)****"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us."**

**L**isten for God's guidance. As long as you keep listening to people whose opinions don't line up with God's Word and God's will, you'll be frustrated and get nowhere. When important decisions must be made that affect the future, you must be able to hear from God. You must also welcome feedback. Why? Because if you're not teachable, you're not usable. Now, the majority opinion can be valuable in run-of-the-mill matters, but when a God-given vision is at issue you must listen for God's guidance first and foremost. You say, "Isn't there wisdom in having a plurality of leadership?" Yes, even the best leaders have blind spots and need people with 20/20 vision in those areas. "Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (v. 1 NKJV). What was the result? "Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, [and] they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question" (v. 2 NKJV). How did the apostles handle it? They said: "God, who knows the heart, acknowledged [the Gentiles] by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (vv. 8-9 NKJV). So after prayer and deliberation the apostles wrote a letter to the church, saying, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (v. 28 NKJV). And what was the result? "When they had read it, they rejoiced" (v. 31 NKJV).

**"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."****Ro 10:17 NKJV****GROWING IN FAITH**

**I**f you want to know how strong your faith is, pay attention to what's coming out of your mouth. "The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb 4:2 NKJV). It's not enough to read God's Word; you must internalize it, then vocalize it. We say all kinds of things, but the truth is that we don't really believe them because they don't show up in the way we live. You should live in such a way that if God is *not* who He says He is, you'll fall flat on your face. This means: (1) looking for opportunities to trust God more; (2) trusting Him to come through for you regardless of the situation; (3) strengthening your faith for the tough times ahead. And here's how you do it: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." If someone could stick a thermometer under your tongue and take your spiritual temperature, the thing that would cause it to rise or fall would be the time you have spent in God's Word. You say, "Right now my faith is very low." Then start spending more time reading God's Word. You say, "I wish I had the faith of so-and-so." There's no mystery about how to close the gap between your faith and that of others—just log more time in the Scriptures. Rearrange your priorities, take control of your time and put Bible reading at the top of your to-do list. If you're serious about growing in faith, it's a price you must be willing to pay.



**"You are not your own."****1Co 6:19 NKJV****GOD'S CLAIMS ON YOUR LIFE (1)**

**P**icture two people standing outside of a house. One says, "This is my house." The other replies, "How come?" The first one says, "For three reasons. I built it. I paid for it. I live in it." Let's look at the first reason why you belong to God: *Creation*. Some folks think we all came from an amoeba. The problem is, they can't tell us where the amoeba came from! The Bible says, "God created man in His own image...male and female He created them" (Ge 1:27 NKJV). Some folks say that the earth came into existence as a result of the "big bang" theory. Yet if you told them, "The car you drive right now was the result of an explosion at an assembly plant in Detroit," they'd question your sanity. If there's a design, there must be a designer. If there's a creation, there must be a Creator. And since God made you He holds ownership rights over you. The Bible says: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1Co 6:19-20 NKJV). Not only did God create you, He gave you certain gifts so that you could fulfill His purposes and bring glory to Him. So before they tag your toe and write your obituary, ask God what you were born to do. Only by finding and fulfilling His purpose, can you fill the God-shaped space within you that you were born with.

SUNDAY JULY 21

**"Ye are bought with a price."****1Co 6:20****GOD'S CLAIMS ON YOUR LIFE (2)**

**G**od's second claim on your life is *Calvary*. The story's told of two friends went to law school. One became a judge, the other became a law breaker and ended up in court. Guess who was sitting in the judge's seat? His friend. So how could the judge be merciful, yet still be just? Taking off the black robes of justice, he walked over to the dock where the prisoner stood and said, "Not only am I this man's friend, today I'm his savior. I will stand chargeable with all his debts." At the cross God took all your sin and put it on Christ's account, and took all Christ's righteousness and put it on your account. And the moment you trust Christ as your Savior you're no longer under the sentence of death. The value of something is determined by the price a buyer is willing to pay for it. At Calvary God said, "This is how much I love you!" Your Creator became your Redeemer. "The Maker of the universe, as Man for man was made a curse. The claims of law that He had made, unto the uttermost He paid."

To fulfill His purposes in the earth, God always had a man. To deliver the Israelites from Egypt, He used Moses. To challenge the prophets of Baal, He used Elijah. But when it came to your salvation, God "saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation" (Isa 59:16 NKJV). The good news is: when God could not find a man, He Himself became a man; that we who are the sons of men, might become the sons of God. Awesome!

**"Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."****1Co 6:20****GOD'S CLAIMS ON YOUR LIFE (3)**

**G**od's third claim on your life is *consecration*. It's not a word we hear very much these days. It means "to be set aside for the exclusive use of." You say, "But I have so many faults." God's not looking for perfection, He's looking for willingness. The Bible says, "Every high priest [was] taken from among men" (Heb 5:1 NKJV). The people God calls and uses are all human and flawed in some way. Why would God call someone like that? Because they "can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since [they also are] subject to weakness" (v. 2 NKJV). You say, "My parents want me to go to Bible school and be a minister." Well, there's good news and bad. The good news is that Bible school can deepen your devotion to Christ and give you insights into His Word. The bad news is that your parents can't call you, only God can! "No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God" (v. 4 NKJV). You say, "How will I know I'm called to a ministry?" Fruitfulness! When controversy broke out in Israel over who should be in leadership, God told Moses to pick a man from each of the twelve tribes. That man's rod was placed in the ark of the covenant overnight, and the one whose rod "budded" was the one God had called. The Bible says: "A man's gift makes room for him" (Pr 18:16 NKJV). When God calls you He will open the doors, make the connections, and provide the resources. All He asks of you is a life that's consecrated to doing His will.

TUESDAY JULY 23

**"Let us keep in step with the Spirit."****Gal 5:25 NIV****LEARN TO BE LED BY GOD'S SPIRIT**

**I**f the Christian life is about having a personal relationship with God, then God must still speak to us today. But a relationship can't be built on one-way speeches. First, it requires commitment. Then it requires communication between two people in which each speaks and listens to the other. "You...are controlled...by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Ro 8:9 NIV). That means having Spirit-controlled responses, and making Spirit-led decisions. When you follow God life no longer consists only of that which can be seen, felt or figured out. It includes walking by faith, trusting Him, learning to know His voice and the leadings of His Spirit. Some of us are reluctant to do that because we've seen people who claim to be doing it and their approach scares us. So when we sense the Spirit's leading we doubt it, analyze it, conclude it isn't logical and don't pay attention to it. Some of us want to obey the Spirit, but we're not sure we know that He's really speaking to us. We wonder, "Is this God's voice or my own desires?" We've all experienced this; it's a normal part of the Christian life. This is why Paul writes, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Spiritual guidance is learned—one step at a time. Even the most mature believer will stumble and get it wrong at times. No problem: "The Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Ps 37:23-24 NIV).

*Write or E-mail us with testimonies, comments, and requests. We love to hear from you!*

**CONFIDENCE (1)**

Never mistake competence for confidence; one is ability-based, the other comes from knowing who you are in Christ; that you're "complete in him" (1Jn 2:5 NIV). One author says: "The first thing I learned about confidence, was I didn't possess it...I had a thin glaze of arrogance covering a core of fear. All those years of being a success in the eyes of the world left me deathly afraid of failure. *Worldly* success requires taking risks beyond the comfort zones of previous accomplishments. *Spiritual* success requires letting go of outcomes and allowing God to move on your behalf. I was so afraid of failure...I never found success in it either...the false confidence I'd known was built on my own abilities... However if you suddenly find a lump in your breast, or your spouse says he never loved you, or you get fired from your job, or your child is seriously ill, every tactic you've ever employed and every skill you've ever mastered will get you nowhere...The Bible says, 'Have a sane estimate of your [abilities]' (Ro 12:4 PHPS)...once you realize you aren't perfect...you can exhale and start the task of being good enough...When your confidence stems from knowing the Almighty, unchanging One, you cannot be shaken by change or circumstances. You...exude competence, peace, contentment, and fortitude.' Isn't it time you got out from under the pressure of acting like God and having all the answers? 'We have different gifts, according to the grace given us' (Ro 12:6 NIV). When you use your gift to glorify God, you're doing what He intended you to do.

THURSDAY JULY 25

**"Who told you...you were naked?"****Ge 3:11 NKJV****CONFIDENCE (2)**

It's impossible to feel confident when you're telling yourself you're not good enough and that you'll never amount to anything. One pastor says: "After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they hid. God came to them and said, 'Where are you?' They said, 'We're hiding because we're naked.' I love how God answered...Who told you...you were naked? In other words, 'Who told you there was something wrong with you?' God immediately knew the Enemy had been talking to them. And God's saying to you today, 'Who told you...you don't have what it takes to succeed...that the best grades you can make are C's...that you're not attractive enough to succeed in your relationships...or talented enough to flourish in your career...or that your marriage isn't going to last? Those are lies from the Enemy. God said, 'No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly' (Ps 84:11 NKJV); 'Delight yourself...in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart' (Ps 37:4 NKJV). The potential is inside you...and it doesn't change because you don't believe it, or because you've been through negative experiences. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Ro 11:29 NKJV). He's never going to take back the potential He poured into you...or say, 'I'm tired of dealing with you...you've failed too often and made too many mistakes. Give Me back My gifts.' No...His calling on your life will be with you till the day you leave this earth, but it's up to you to...tap into it.' When the Enemy starts chipping away at your confidence, take authority over him in Jesus' Name; resist him and he will flee (See Jas 4:7).

**"Run to win!"****WINNING**

In the Roman Empire athletes stripped down to a simple loincloth so that nothing prevented them from running their best race. Referring to it, Paul writes: "Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step" (vv. 24-26 NLT). How about you? Do you just want the fun of being in the race, or are you running to win? To succeed at being what God has redeemed and called you to be, you'll have to *stop* doing certain things, even enjoyable things, and *begin* doing other things that support your goals and help you to fulfill your God-ordained purpose. Sometimes this will mean saying no to well-intentioned people who try to involve you in things that steal your time and produce the wrong results. It will also mean dealing with "the sin that so easily entangles" (Heb 12:1 NIV). When God says something is wrong, it's wrong! You don't need to rationalize, make excuses or feel sorry for yourself. You just need to agree, ask His forgiveness and get it out of your life. Who gets the prize? Those who pay the price! Paul knew he couldn't win the race without first bringing his body, mind and emotions under the control of God's Spirit. The same goes for you. And you can't expect somebody else to make you do what's right; you must listen to what God's saying to you, and take action.

SATURDAY JULY 27

**Mk 5:15 NKJV****"Clothed and in his right mind."****THEN JESUS CAME!**

One of Christ's greatest miracles was the healing of a man who was controlled and tortured by evil spirits (See v. 2 NKJV). The Bible says: "His dwelling [was] among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains...neither could anyone tame him...always, night and day, he was...crying out and cutting himself with stones" (vv. 3-5 NKJV). Notice four things about this man's condition: (1) *He kept hurting himself.* Now, he used stones to do it, but some of us use drugs, food, sex, alcohol, overwork and negativity. What are you doing today that's hurting you? Until you can acknowledge it, you won't get free of it. (2) *He was preoccupied with death.* Why else would someone choose to live in a graveyard? Life's troubles can bring you to the place where you lose your very desire to live. (3) *He had no peace, day or night.* The downside of godless living is restlessness, irritability and discontent. Nothing satisfies or is ever enough. (4) *He lived in isolation.* Satan's job is made easier when you don't have a spiritual support system. Fellowship wrecks his plans.

Then Jesus came! He made a boat trip across storm-tossed Galilee to get to this man. Just one word from Jesus, and we read: "They...saw the one who had been demon-possessed...sitting...clothed and in his right mind." Out of gratitude the man wanted to join Jesus' disciples. But Jesus told him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you" (v. 19 NKJV). When Christ sets you free, your first responsibility is to stay free and help set others free.

KEEP GROWING (1)

In prison with no possibility of release, and facing the certainty of death on the chopping block, Paul asked Timothy to bring his books. Why? Because he wanted to keep growing. The truth is: (1) *When you finish growing, you're finished.* When the poet Longfellow was old an admirer asked him how he was able to keep writing so beautifully. Pointing to a nearby apple tree he replied, "That tree is very old, but I never saw prettier blossoms. The tree grows a little new wood every year, and out of that new wood those blossoms come. So I try to grow a little each year." (2) *Growth doesn't come easy.* It will stretch you. It will challenge you to rethink assumptions you've always believed to be right. Indeed, it can cost you friends and money. But when you're committed to growth you cannot settle for ignorance. (3) *Growth is your responsibility.* When you were a child your parents were responsible for your growth, but now you are. The poet Robert Browning wrote, "Why stay we on earth except to grow?" Yet few dedicate themselves to the process. That's because growth requires change, and we're uncomfortable with the things change brings. Gail Sheehy said, "If we don't change we won't grow, and if we don't grow we're not really living. Growth demands the temporary surrender of security. It means giving up familiar but limiting patterns, safe but unrewarding work, values no longer believed in, relationships that have lost their meaning. Taking a new step is what we fear most, yet our real fear should be the opposite." Can you think of *anything* worse than a life devoid of growth?

KEEP GROWING (2)

When it comes to growth, Christ is our example. The Bible says that He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk 2:52 NIV). To enjoy favor with God and others you must keep growing spiritually, mentally and emotionally. That requires you to do two things: (1) *Never stop learning.* Every experience in life, including the ones you don't enjoy, yields knowledge that can make your future better than your present. But you have to look for it. The downside to the Internet and the iPhone is that you get endless "hits" of information you don't process or glean anything from. Instead of letting life just "happen" to you, you need to stop and ask yourself, "What's really happening here? I'm hearing it, but what does it mean?" You are body, soul, and spirit, so you need to ask, "Am I healthy physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually?" No one can answer that question but you. (2) *Never stop developing your talents.* When one of the world's greatest violinists was an old man, he was asked why he still practiced six to eight hours every day. He replied, "Because I think I'm getting better." What a great attitude! It's not enough just to live longer, you're supposed to live better! Paul told Timothy, "Stir up the gift...which is within you." (2Ti 1:6 NKJV). Wesley Tracy said, "Some people have the notion that following your spiritual gift is spending the days and years of your life doing only those things which come naturally, easily, with no effort, discipline or practice. No, your gift can either be mediocre or excellent; it's up to you."

KEEP GROWING (3)

Let's look at two more things you need to grow: (1) *Don't just grow in knowledge, grow in character.* The truth is, God is more interested in your character than He is in your career. Why? Because success without character has the potential to hurt you, and those around you. The Bible says: "Make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be" (vv. 5-8 NLT). Note the words "make every effort." You've got to work at it! (2) *Always stay fresh.* Did you hear the old story about the country pastor who was preaching when his notes flew out the church window and a cow grazing nearby ate them? Three days later the cow went dry. Hello! Stay thirsty. Stay hungry. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6 NIV). Ultimately it's not your talents, but your desire that determines your destiny. One of Paul's highest compliments was given to the believers in the Thessalonian church: "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (2Th 1:3 NIV). Let that be said of you.

THE WAY OUT

The Bible says, "When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure." Maybe you are in a situation—a relationship or a financial condition—that's not what you wanted. You can lie down and die. But when you don't—when you show up, when you offer the best you have—something good is happening *inside* you that far outweighs whatever is happening *outside* you. Jesus was facing adversity when He told His followers that if they had faith, they could command a mountain and it would be cast into the sea. Now, when your focus is on the mountain, you are driven by your fear. But when your focus is on God, you are made alive by faith. But if you didn't face the mountain you'd never know that faith was in you, or to what extent. Adversity has a way of changing your values and priorities for the better. When you're on the treadmill of money, security, or success, and adversity knocks you off, you start seeing the folly of chasing temporal things. And if you're wise you resolve not to return to your old way of life when things normalize. But the key to accomplishing this is taking action *before* normal life takes over again. You have a finite window of time to make changes; otherwise you'll drift back into your old patterns. While the memory of your adversity is still fresh, pray and ask God what changes He wants to make in your attitudes, your relationships, your habits and your lifestyle, and "He will show you a way out."

BE THEIR GUIDING LIGHT

Every child, including yours, is born "lost" into a world of moral and spiritual darkness. So parent, your most urgent responsibility is to be their guiding light.

Paul Harvey told of a hard-drinking father who left his adolescent son in a pickup truck and went into a bar for a drink. Two hours later, Dad lumbered back to the truck, finding his boy missing. Later, in the bar, he found his son in the company of a couple of inebriated young hoodlums who'd gotten him drunk. In the ensuing fight with them Dad ended up bleeding on the floor, his distressed son kneeling over him, pleading, "Please don't be mad at me, Pop. I just followed you!"

We all follow someone, hoping they know the way. The Bible says, "Ahaziah son of Ahab...did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he walked in the ways of his father and mother" (1Ki 22:51-52 NIV). Our children may not follow our advice, but they will follow our example, whether good or bad. We are called to be signposts at their crossroads; road maps in their confusion. Paul encouraged his spiritual children, saying, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1Co 11:1 NIV). You don't need a college degree in parenting to shine at home. Embracing and living out Christ's teaching each day qualifies you to be the best parent you can be! A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons (and daughters) after him" (Pr 20:7 NAS).

FRIDAY AUGUST 2

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ...to suffer."

Php 1:29 NKJV

SUFFERING WITH GRACE

You need the kind of faith that not only believes God for good things, but also sustains you through bad things. The Bible says, "If you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid...Instead...worship Christ as Lord of your life" (1Pe 3:14-15 NLT). God has foresight but we have only hindsight. So whether the path you've been called to walk is rough or smooth, your attitude should be one of "worship," acknowledging "Christ as Lord of your life." Joseph's kidnapping led to the saving of his family. The lions' den led Daniel to a cabinet position. Christ entered the world by a surprise pregnancy and redeemed it through an unjust murder. Do you believe what the Bible teaches—that no disaster is ultimately fatal? Chrysostom did. He was the archbishop of Constantinople from AD 398 to 404. He gained a following by his eloquent denunciations of corruption in the church. Twice banished by the authorities, he asked: "What can I fear? Will it be death? But to know that Christ is my life, and that I shall gain by death. Will it be exile? But the earth is the Lord's and its fullness is the Lord's. Will it be by loss of wealth? But we have brought nothing into the world, and we can carry nothing out. Thus all the terrors of the world are contemptible in my eyes; and I smile at all its good things. Poverty I do not fear; riches I do not sigh for. Death I do not shrink from." That's suffering with grace!

*Is there someone you've been trying to reach for Christ?  
Send them a copy of this devotional.*

"Then Moses said to the Lord."

ARE YOU HEARING FROM GOD?

Throughout the book of Exodus we read these two statements: "The Lord said to Moses," and "Moses said to the people." There's an important lesson here. Until you have heard from God, what do you have to say to anybody else that's worth consideration? Does that mean God won't use your brain? No, when your thoughts and desires are submitted to Him He will actually *think and speak* through you. What a privilege. The trouble is, we want to speak without first consulting God and hearing from Him. The people Moses had been called to lead hadn't heard from God for four hundred years. After ten generations of living without God's Word, can you imagine the shape they were in spiritually? If you want to know how such a mindset will act, look at their responses every time they had a problem in the wilderness. They wanted to go back to the security of Egypt! This is one of the dangers you will face as a leader. You must *love* people and *listen* to them, but you must be *led* only by God. And unless you know God intimately, when times get tough people will take you back to what's familiar and comfortable to them. When people want to go back to their old way of doing things, it's usually because they don't know God well enough. The litmus test of spiritual leadership is found in the ability to hear from God, then teach people to love God, discern His will, and begin to walk according to it!

SUNDAY AUGUST 4

"Despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ."

Ro 8:37 NLT

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH (1)

Just as there is a condition known as "post-traumatic stress," researchers are now talking about "post-traumatic growth." One line of thinking is that adversity can lead to growth. Another is that the highest levels of growth cannot be achieved *without* adversity. But adversity doesn't automatically bring growth. Much of the outcome depends on how you respond to adversity. Ernest Hemingway wrote, "Sooner or later, the world breaks everyone, and those who are broken are strongest in the broken places." Sometimes that's true. But sometimes people write beautiful things and believe them to be true—or hope they're true—and yet they don't help. Hemingway himself had a brokenness that ended his life because the pain was too great. On the other hand Joseph, who was betrayed by his family, falsely accused of rape and unjustly imprisoned, looked back and said, "God intended it all for good" (Ge 50:20 NLT). The key to post-traumatic growth is in seeing God in all things, drawing close to Him, trusting Him when you can't understand the situation, and knowing He only has your best interests at heart. When it comes to serving God there are two sides to the coin: success and suffering. We like the first, and try to avoid the second. But they're both part of God's plan. God called Paul into the ministry, saying, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake" (Ac 9:16 NLT). But hard times didn't make Paul doubt his faith, or the God he served: "No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us."

**POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH (2)**

Rising to a challenge reveals hidden abilities within you that otherwise would have remained dormant. Just as you find out what's inside a tube of toothpaste when it gets squeezed, adversity reveals what you're made of. Sometimes we say, "I could never go through what that person went through. I would die." Then you go through it, and guess what? Your heart keeps beating. Your world goes on. You don't know what you're capable of until you have to cope. Wise people have always understood the connection between suffering and growth. Meng Tzu, the Chinese sage, said, "When heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man it will place obstacles in the path of his deeds so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent." God could have let Abraham stay in the comfort of Ur, and Moses in the splendor of Pharaoh's courts. He could have kept Daniel out of the lions' den, Nehemiah out of captivity, Jonah out of the whale, John the Baptist away from Herod, Esther from being threatened, Jeremiah from being rejected, and Paul from being shipwrecked. But He didn't. In fact, God used each of these trials to bring them closer to Himself—to produce perseverance, character and hope. It's said, "The school of hard knocks produces the greatest scholars." And guess who the teacher is? Adversity! You either face it with God, or without Him. And those without God are watching you. When they see your faith sustain you and God bring you through, they'll get interested in what you have to say. And not before!

TUESDAY AUGUST 6

**"My grace is sufficient for you."****2Cor 12:9 NKJV****POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH (3)**

One of the classic stories of adversity in the Bible is about Joseph. At the beginning of his life he is the favorite son, envied by his brothers, with dreams of being someone everybody bows down to. Then he's kidnapped by his brothers and ends up serving as a slave in Potiphar's house. He loses his home, his culture, his security and his status as favorite son. What does Joseph have left? He is in a strange bed, in a strange house, in a strange land, with no friends, no prospects, and no explanation. But he has one gift—one that makes all the difference. "The Lord was with Joseph" (Ge 39:2 NIV). What happens when you lose everything but God, then find out that God is enough? You experience His presence in a way you never did before! Paul writes: "Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us" (Ro 8:35-37 NLT). God wasn't at work producing the circumstances Joseph wanted. He was at work in bad circumstances producing the Joseph that God wanted. Just as a diamond is formed out of common carbon placed under millions of pounds of pressure—so the character of Christ is formed in you by adverse circumstances. So the question is, will you hold up or fold up? When Paul thought he couldn't stand any more, God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2Co 12:9 NKJV). And do you know what? His grace is sufficient for you too.

**"They nominated...Barsabbas...and Matthias."****Ac 1:23 NLT****HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT LEADER**

When Judas committed suicide the team of apostles was one man short. So what did they do? "They nominated two men...Barsabbas...and Matthias." To decide which one was called to take the place of Judas, they used a method known as "casting lots." It was a system used in biblical times when only a few select people could actually speak with God or hear from Him personally. As a result, Matthias was chosen. You say, "But I've never heard of Matthias." And nobody else has either! He is not mentioned again in Scripture. But Barsabbas, the man who didn't get the vote, is referred to as one of the leaders who steered the church through some treacherous waters of doctrinal error (See Ac 15:22-23). There are two important lessons for us in this story:

(1) *You can know God but you will never be able to figure Him out.* So stop trying. You can't reduce Him to a formula and say, "This is the way He always does it." Casting lots was a system God may have honored in the past, but when the apostles tried it they didn't get the results they hoped for. (2) *God will speak to you if you are willing to listen.* Before leaving them, Jesus had told His disciples that the indwelling Holy Spirit would guide them. "All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever He receives from me'" (Jn 16:15 NLT). You say, "But how will I know the Holy Spirit has spoken to me?" Because it will produce the results that God wants!

THURSDAY AUGUST 8

**"Blessed (happy, to be envied...) are the poor in spirit (the humble, who rate themselves insignificant)."****Mt 5:3 AMP****MARITAL HAPPINESS**

When the rosy glow diminishes and reality sets in, what makes some marriages happy while others slide into misery? Luck? Good genes? Hanging tough? Hardly! Marital happiness that transcends changing circumstances is built on the qualities Jesus taught. Let's look at them: (1) *Happy are the humble.* "Blessed (happy...) are the poor in spirit (the humble, who rate themselves insignificant)." Pride that's self-promoting and always demanding its rights brings misery, while humility, self-denial and considering your mate's needs brings happiness. (2) *Happy are the meek:* the gentle, patient and kind. Handling your spouse's struggles with kindness, sensitivity and long-suffering is an expression of love that brings healing into the painful chapters of life and marriage. (3) *Happy are the merciful.* Sooner or later we'll inflict injury on one another. Hurt, disappointment and anger will rise up, followed by a desire to make them pay. But just as revenge begets revenge, mercy begets mercy. Mercy isn't "letting them get away with it." Treating your spouse mercifully is reciprocal. It creates an atmosphere, where, when you fail, you "shall obtain mercy." Mercy ends disputes when nothing else works! (4) *Happy are the peacemakers.* The need to be "right" and "win" only intensifies conflict. In marriage, when one "wins," both lose! Giving up personal victory to be a peacemaker is ultimate victory. You'd be eternally lost if Jesus hadn't willingly surrendered His rights for your wrongs. The ring is not the sole symbol of Christian marriage, but the cross superimposed on the ring. Christlike surrender of our uncrucified self promotes marital happiness!

**"I know that my Redeemer lives."****Job 19:25 NKJV****JOB'S CREED (1)**

The patriarch Job survived boils, bankruptcy and bereavement and came out with his faith intact. Let's look at the creed he lived by: (1) *"I know."* When you can say, "I know," you're an exclamation point in a world of question marks. Job didn't say, "I have been told." What he knew about God, he knew through experience and personal revelation. Is such a life possible? Yes, "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (1Jn 2:20 NKJV). You can "know" things about God in your heart that you can't fully understand or explain. Why? Because they're spiritually discerned. (2) *"That my Redeemer lives."* Though Christ was not yet born, Job caught a glimpse of our pre-existent Redeemer whom Scripture describes as "the Ancient of Days" (Da 7:22 NKJV); the one Micah referred to "whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Mi 5:2 NKJV). He existed before He was born, and He outlived His pallbearers. Paul says, "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2Co 8:9 NKJV). (3) *"And that he shall stand at last on the earth."* Job saw what Zechariah the prophet saw: "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (Zec 14:4 NKJV). The truth is, the first time Jesus came, He came to save. The next time He comes, He comes to reign. His first coming was to be our Redeemer; His second coming is to usher in His rule as King of Kings. "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13 NKJV).

SATURDAY AUGUST 10

**"This I know...I shall see God."****Job 19:26 NKJV****JOB'S CREED (2)**

Job ends his creed by saying, *"After my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God."* When Christ returns, your body which sleeps in the grave will be replaced with a glorious Christlike body. And then the promise of God's Word will be fulfilled: "Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust" (Isa 26:19 NKJV). Of all the religions on earth, Christianity is the only one that guarantees the resurrection of your body. And that's because Christ, our leader, was the only one capable of promising to rise from the dead bodily, and keeping that promise. Rejoice, when they lay you in your grave it will not be the last of you. Paul writes: "I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1Co 15:51-54 NKJV). In that day faith will give way to sight. When a little boy's kite flew so high it went out of sight, a man standing nearby asked him, "How do you know it's still up there, son?" Tightening his grip on the string, he replied, "Because I feel the tug!" Do you feel something tugging you heavenward?

If you're enjoying this devotional, please write and let us know!



# IT'S TIME TO RENEW!

**ONLY 20 DAYS LEFT TO CONTINUE  
YOUR SUBSCRIPTION.**

SUNDAY AUGUST 11

**"Well informed, quick to understand...qualified to serve." Da 1:4 NIV****YOU'VE GOT TO WORK AT IT!**

When Nebuchadnezzar captured the Jews he told his Chief of Staff to look for the brightest and best, and bring them to his palace. He wanted the following qualities: "Showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace." Daniel seized the opportunity. Yes, God gave him favor, but he also had to work at it! The CEO of one of the world's largest companies put it this way: "The only way you're going to stand out is to grasp this simple principle: when your boss asks you a question, assigns you a project or sends you to gather data, he already knows the answer he's looking for. He just wants you to confirm that what he believes is true. Most people do just that. But there's a difference. You must understand that the question is only the *beginning*. To elevate yourself, you must sink your thoughts into not only answering the question, but going above and beyond it. That means presenting him with three or four other ideas that he had probably not considered. Your goal should be to add value to the idea by exceeding expectations. This is true not only with questions, but assignments, initiatives, and anything else ever given you to do. If you understand that the question is only the beginning, you'll get out of the pile fast, because 99 percent of all employees stay in the pile because they don't *think*. If you understand this principle, you'll be given even more critical questions to answer, and in time, you will be the one giving the questions to others."

**FORGIVENESS (1)**

One author writes: "Think of an area of unforgiveness and see if any of these *Reasons* to hold a grudge resonate with you. (a) Anger keeps more potent emotions at bay; once it's gone you fear the emotional flood that may follow. (b) A grudge takes time and energy, and you're not sure who you'd be without it. (c) You've replayed your 'personal-betrayal-and-hurt movie' so often you know it by heart. (d) The idea of moving on is terrifying, whereas misery is familiar. (e) The offender has done nothing to deserve forgiveness. (f) Harboring resentment stops you from getting hurt again because nobody can get close." Jesus said, "Why...look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?" (Mt 7:3 NIV). This author says, "I've banged my plank into walls and around corners so often I'm certain I have retina damage!" Now consider these *Reasons for releasing a grudge*. (a) Relinquishing past hurts frees you to embrace the present and future. (b) When you're not spending time and energy feeding a grudge, you can nourish new, healthy ideas. (c) The offender can't keep hurting you when you shake off the shaddes and move on. (d) Holding a grudge feels like a form of control, but actually you're the one being controlled. (e) Once you lower your defenses you can start to heal, love, and be loved. (f) Feeling angry feels good temporarily, but being healed feels so much better. (g) God mandates us to love because He first loved us. You've held onto it long enough; it's time to let it go and enjoy the freedom that comes from forgiveness.

TUESDAY AUGUST 13

**"Forgiving each other, just as...God forgave you."****Eph 4:32 NIV****FORGIVENESS (2)**

The Bible says, "Be kind...forgiving each other...as...God forgave you." Kristin Armstrong says: "After you forgive...you get to walk out the process...it's a collaborative effort of God's power and your hard work. Letting go isn't always as simple as opening your tightly-clenched fist, although deliverance sometimes is immediate. For example, some people quit smoking cold-turkey, while others chew nicotine gum for years! Old habits die hard, and letting go of resentment means: (a) Recommitting to your decision as many times as old thoughts of unforgiveness pop into your head. (b) Making peace with the space formerly occupied by bitterness, regret and thoughts of revenge until the Holy Spirit takes up full-time occupancy in the new digs! (c) Releasing old, toxic relationships and people whose only purpose is keeping your old wounds fresh. When people change around unchanging people, it makes them aware of their own need for change, and it scares them. (d) Just as your salvation is immediate yet you have to walk out your sanctification, the release of your forgiveness is immediate but you have to walk out your healing. (e) Living a life free from the burden of resentment and the toxicity of unforgiveness is a choice followed by a series of choices. Each one becomes easier...as we move farther from our old ways and into the light...Paul said, 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free' (Gal 5:1 NIV) and every time we let something or someone go free, we receive freedom for ourselves in overflowing proportion. It's a time-tested, guaranteed spiritual principle backed by the promise of Scripture."

**"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings."****Pr 22:29 NIV****HAVE A WORK ETHIC GOD CAN BLESS**

Journalist William Zinsser's first job was writing for *The New York Herald Tribune*. Traditionally "cub" reporters often start by writing obituaries, but Zinsser was frustrated with his assignment. "I could be doing Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporting," he thought to himself, "and I'm stuck writing obituaries." Finally he worked up enough courage to ask his editor, "When am I going to get some decent story assignments?" His crusty old editor growled at him and said, "Listen, kid, nothing you write will ever get read as carefully as what you are writing right now. You misspell a name, you mess up a date, and a family will be hurt. But you do justice to somebody's grandmother or somebody's mom, you make a life sing, and they will be grateful forever. They will put your words in laminate." "Things changed. I pledged I would make the extra calls," Zinsser said. "I would ask the extra questions. I would go the extra mile." That is essentially from the Sermon on the Mount—write obituaries for others as you would want others to write an obituary for you—obituaries that deserve to be laminated—because someday, somebody will. Zinsser eventually moved on to other kinds of writing, including a book on writing itself that has sold more than a million copies. But none of it would have happened if he had not devoted himself to obituaries. Understand this: if you cannot experience the spirit in the work you are doing today, then you cannot experience the spirit today at all.

THURSDAY AUGUST 15

**"He rewards those who earnestly seek him."****Heb 11:6 NIV****GETTING "UNSTUCK" (1)**

Ever notice how icy winters cause multiple car pile-ups, leaving drivers in ditches waiting for tow trucks to rescue them? In life, we each have different reactions. Some surrender to feelings of being powerless, others get frustrated and deepen the rut they're in. But the wise think rationally of steps they can take to get unstuck. *Getting stuck* isn't always an option, but *staying stuck* is! Good news: no matter how long you've been stuck, the right attitude can get you moving again. So here are some attitude changers: (1) *Forgiveness*. The guilt that follows failure can immobilize you long-term, but forgiveness liberates you—freeing up your energy and creativity. Forgiveness is two-dimensional: first, you must receive God's forgiveness for your failures. Things you've done: betrayal, angry words, dishonesty, broken promises, etc. Things you haven't done: love unexpressed, responsibility avoided, a child, parent or spouse neglected, the truth withheld. Heartfelt confession always brings God's forgiveness! (See 1Jn 1:9). Second, you must forgive those who've failed you—parents, siblings, children, bosses, spouses, friends, enemies, etc. Severing the chains to your past restores your options for the future. (2) *Faith*. When you've been stuck a long time, forward momentum can seem impossible. You lack direction, energy and confidence. What to do? Getting traction requires a willingness to act in spite of your feelings. God calls this "faith," and He always responds to it! "He rewards those who earnestly seek him." When you *act* like you believe, God will reward your faith—and the *feeling* of faith will follow your action!

**"I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back."****Php 3:14 TM****GETTING "UNSTUCK" (2)**

Though you've settled the issues of forgiveness and faith, getting unstuck involves two more challenges. You will need to learn: (1) *Flexibility*. When your faith runs into obstacles, your flexibility keeps you in the race. You need the ability to "roll with the punches," to bend without breaking. Don't marry your methods! Be willing to make a mid-course correction when it's needed. Flexibility, however, isn't ambivalence or wishy-washiness. Flexibility is: (a) An attitude of determination to adjust to life's challenges and stay on course; to trust God for wisdom; to fine-tune your responses to changing circumstances. (b) A commitment to take action. A positive mind-set alone won't get you unstuck. You'll have to "do something!" Remember, big doors swing on little hinges; taking small steps of faith will move you forward! (2) *Firmness*: resolve not to quit. You'll encounter problems that leave you no option but to stand still, like the Israelites between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. In the tightest of spots, they received this five-fold counsel: (a) Don't give in to fear. Don't let it decide your response. (b) Stand still. Stop your irrational, emotion-driven behaviors. (c) Quit talking. Don't talk yourself into defeat. (d) Look for God's way forward. Expect Him to take action that will get you unstuck. (e) Be ready to move forward when He opens the way. These are simple but powerful steps you can take when you don't know what to do. And what about when you blow it? Acknowledge it. Relabel it as "Valuable lessons learned," and put it in your "What not to do next time" file!

SATURDAY AUGUST 17

**"I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen."****Ex 31:6 NLT****CHOOSE THE PEOPLE GOD HAS CHOSEN**

Just as a river can't rise higher than its source, no enterprise can rise higher than its leadership. When it was time to build the tabernacle God told Moses: "I have specifically chosen Bezalel...I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise...He is a master craftsman...He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood...And I have personally appointed Oholiab...to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make" (vv. 1-6 NLT). Whether you are in ministry or in business, here's a plan that will bring you success: (1) *Be sure that the people you choose are the people God has chosen for you*. This calls for a prayerful and careful approach to hiring. Hiring isn't fun, and firing is agony. But so is trying to undo other people's mistakes! (2) *Look for those to whom God has given "wisdom, ability, and expertise."* Not only must they have the right skill set, they must have the same spirit you have; otherwise you are headed for conflict. (3) *Don't stake your future on any one person, however gifted*. "I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen." If Oholiab goes rogue or messes up, you need to have other "craftsmen" in place to carry the vision forward. (4) *Make sure the goals you have set line up with God's will*. "Make all the things I have commanded." Ideas are important; God's plan is all-important!

**"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."****Mt 27:51 NIV****YOU CAN APPROACH GOD WITH CONFIDENCE**

One day a year, on the Day of Atonement (at-one-ment), the high priest could go beyond the thick curtain in the tabernacle and into the "Holy of Holies" where God's presence was. What qualified him to go there was the fact that the blood of a sacrificial lamb was covering the mercy seat, under which rested the ark of the covenant. You ask, "What was in the ark?" The Ten Commandments—which all of us have broken. God arranged it like that. The only way God could look at the evidence of His people's guilt was through the blood of the lamb. Now, fast forward to the cross. Jesus "gave up His spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Everything changed for the better that day! In spite of your failures, you can now come into God's presence, knowing your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus, and confidently ask for whatever you need. "Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Heb 4:16 NLT). Your acceptance with God is guaranteed when you approach Him saying, "I come in the name of Jesus and on the merits of His shed blood." It works like a credit system. "You are in Christ," so you have a perfect credit score! So even when you feel inadequate and underserving, if you ask in faith believing, God will give it to you "for Christ's sake" (Eph 4:32).

MONDAY AUGUST 19

**Mt 25:6 NKJV****"And at midnight a cry was heard."****MIDNIGHT MADNESS (1)**

You've probably heard the story of the five wise virgins and the five foolish ones. Jesus told it. A requirement for being allowed to participate in a wedding in those days, was that your lamp had to be burning. But when the bridegroom showed up five of these virgins were out of oil. So they said to the other five, "Give us some of your oil" (v. 8 NKJV). But they said, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you" (v. 9 NKJV). So while they went to town to buy oil the wedding started and they were locked out. Christ's parable teaches us four important lessons: (1) *The foolishness of depending on somebody else*. Your mother and father may have been Christians, but that won't get you into heaven. You must accept Christ as your own personal Savior. (2) *The futility of last-minute preparations*. "While they went to buy, the bridegroom came" (v. 10 NKJV). Remember, Jesus is teaching about the kind of people who will be living when He returns. So here's the question: Are you putting salvation off until you're old? What if you don't live that long? (3) *The finality of judgment*. "And the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you'" (vv. 10-12 NKJV). (4) *The fallacy of morality*. They were "virgins," yet they were shut out. Your character and good works won't get you into heaven. "By grace are ye saved through faith" (Eph 2:8). Are you ready to meet the Lord? If not, put your faith in Him today and get ready.



**"While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered."**

**Mt 25:5 NKJV**

### MIDNIGHT MADNESS (2)

Let's look at these ten virgins and see what else we can learn from them. Observe three things: (1) *The midnight crowd.* "While the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept." Who slept? The wise as well as the foolish; the world as well as the church. Paul warns, "It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Ro 13:11 NKJV). We're in mortal combat with an Enemy who observes no truce, no armistice and no peace treaties. The *Titanic* disregarded five warnings before it hit the iceberg. The naval yard at Pearl Harbor disregarded six warnings before it was attacked. Christ is not coming back for the religious but the redeemed; not for the refined but the regenerated; not the respectable but the righteous. (2) *The midnight cry.* "At midnight a cry was heard: Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Mt 25:6 NKJV). All around us the voices of fear sound. Where can we look for hope? To government? To bankers? To industry? To academics? No, our hope can be found in these words: "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13 NKJV). (3) *The midnight crisis.* The urgent message of this parable is: Some will have enough to get them into the wedding, others will not. So what should you do? Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Lk 21:36).

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 21

**"Who has believed our report?"**

**Isa 53:1 NKJV**

### WHOSE "REPORT" WILL YOU BELIEVE?

An oil spill pollutes the Gulf of Mexico, devastating marine life and the livelihood of millions of people. Day after day we watch it on TV, in real time. An earthquake hits Haiti, 200,000 die, and the world's poorest people are left hungry and homeless. An American-born terrorist flies home from an Al Qaeda training camp with a bomb in his underwear and tries to destroy not only the plane, but much of Detroit. Bankers, car makers and oil executives we trusted sit in front of a Congressional committee and say they have no idea how we got into this mess. The reports keep coming 24/7. Talking heads in the media milk each moment and sensationalize each event because it increases their ratings, sells advertising and makes money. Indeed, some of the news reporters have become celebrities. Fear sells! It's a major industry. Paradoxically, we are the most prosperous generation in history, and the most fearful one too. In the past you had to get your daily dose of anxiety from the evening news; today you get it around the clock on your BlackBerry or iPad. Now you can't bury your head in the sand. But if you're not selective in what you listen to, you can lose your peace of mind. God knows this, so His Word asks, "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" In Scripture, the "arm of the Lord" speaks of His power to deliver and His providential care over every event in our lives. So whose report are you going to listen to, internalize, and respond to?

**"These things happened to them as examples...for us." 1Co 10:11 NIV**

### SAMSON AND JOSEPH (1)

Samson was a loser, Joseph was a winner. Samson had everything going for him. He was the product of a miracle birth, raised by godly parents, and given supernatural strength. Yet he failed miserably. Why? (1) *He did not pray.* The only time we read of Samson praying is when he was in trouble. Sound familiar? If you conduct a post-mortem on your biggest failures, somewhere in the wreckage you'll find that you've forsaken the place of prayer. You can't run your car on an empty tank, work on an empty stomach, or pay bills on an empty checking account. And you can't live a victorious Christian life without daily prayer. (2) *He refused to live by God's Word.* When confronted by his parents over marrying the wrong woman, Samson told them, "She pleases me well" (Jdg 14:3). When you're led by sentiment rather than Scripture, you're heading for trouble. One of the best definitions of "disobedience" is "incomplete obedience." You can't pick which Scriptures you want to live by and turn a blind eye to the rest! (3) *He had the wrong spirit.* While Joseph extended forgiveness to those who'd harmed him, Samson prayed for revenge. Any time you give in to resentment you're allowing someone other than God to dictate your actions, and you end up suffering even more. (4) *He was motivated by greed.* Consorting with the Philistines, he placed a bet with thirty of them, saying, "If you lose, then you will give me thirty changes of raiment" (See Jdg 14:13). You say, "What's the point?" If it could happen to Samson, it could happen to you!

FRIDAY AUGUST 23

**"These things happened to them as examples...for us." 1Co 10:11 NIV**

### SAMSON AND JOSEPH (2)

While Samson had everything going for him, Joseph had everything going against him. Notice: (1) *He was badly treated by the people of God.* Joseph's brothers resented the vision God gave him and the favor that was upon his life, so they sold him into slavery. Who told you everybody would appreciate you? Not God! Jesus said, "If they hated you, it's because they hated me first" (See Jn 15:18). But Joseph maintained a forgiving spirit and not only ended up being reconciled with his family, but he fed them during the famine. (2) *He was alone in a land where no one had knowledge of God.* But like a lily in a mud marsh, he stayed clean and grew in faith. It's not the circumstances that surround you, but what's within you that determines your success. (3) *He was exposed to temptation.* Joseph was lonely, far from home, and subject to every impulse a red-blooded male can have. Potiphar's wife tried repeatedly to seduce him, but he said no. In his case, there's a good chance that he might have gotten away with it. But his reason for saying no was, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Ge 39:9 NIV). Nothing meant more to Joseph than his relationship with the Lord. (4) *His integrity came at a price.* Based on false accusations by Potiphar's wife, Joseph went to prison for a crime he didn't commit. Did God fall him? No, the contacts needed to get him to the throne were waiting for him in prison. So be true to God and He will bless you.

**FACING YOUR BIGGEST FEARS IN PRAYER**

**T**he next time you drink from the communion cup in church, stop and recall what was in the cup Jesus drank from in Gethsemane on the night before He was crucified. You can drink from the cup with assurance because He first drank from the cup in agony. On the eve of His death He prayed: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death... Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (vv. 34-36 NKJV). Note the words, "exceedingly sorrowful." (If you think your sin is no big deal, perhaps those words will help to change your mind.) Christ drank from the cup of God's wrath so that you could drink from the cup of God's grace. Although He was sinless, He tasted the sins of both the most refined sinner and the most repulsive one. He had never felt God's fury; He didn't deserve to. He had never experienced isolation from His Father; the two had been one from before time began. He had never known physical death; He was an immortal being. Yet within a few hours God would unleash His sin-hating wrath on His sinlessly perfect Son. And as a man, Jesus was afraid. Deathly afraid. And what He did with His fear shows us what to do with ours. He prayed earnestly and persistently. He told His followers, "Sit here while I go and pray over there" (Mt 26:36 NKJV). Jesus faced His ultimate fear with honest prayer, and overcame it. And through prayer, you can overcome your fears too.

SUNDAY AUGUST 25

**"The day doesn't ask, 'Why did you make me this way?'" Isa 45:9 CEV****MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL (1)**

**A** lot of us are unhappy with what we see in the mirror. Indeed, some of us are so unhappy that we spend a fortune to change it. And while it's good to look your best, God never intended our looks as a statement of our value to Him, or to others. Whatever physical features you may have inherited, here are some scriptural truths worth considering: (1) *Resenting your looks just puts you at odds with God.* The Bible says, "You have no right to argue with your Creator. You are... a clay pot shaped by a potter. The clay doesn't ask, 'Why did you make me this way?'" God intends you to be His clay container; a practical, usable vessel; not a fancy ornament for display. "We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us" (2Co 4:7 TM). Your value isn't in how you look, but in what you contain—the life-changing message of God's grace! (2) *Resenting your looks results from false comparisons.* Today we're driven to become reflections of some unattainable ideal. Airbrushed models on TV sell us everything from cornflakes to cars. Let's get real! They are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! (2Co 10:12 NLT). Unhappiness over your appearance results from ignorance of God's marvelous and creative purpose for you. And that'll become clear to you when you "look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect" (Heb 12:2 NCV).

Hurry! Only one week left before the next edition... Order your copy today!

**"Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous."**  
**Ps 139:14 NLT****MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL (2)**

**S**o, how should you view the role of your physical appearance? (1) *With gratitude.* Thank God for the unique person He created you to be. You're not the result of random genetics. You're a genuine "one-off," designed by God to fill a slot no one else can fill. He is what makes you who you are! "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb" (v.13 NLT). "Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous." You didn't come from an assembly line like some product designed to fulfill a quota. No, you received the detailed, individualized focus of the Divine Architect. The Psalmist said, "You watched me as I was being formed... as I was woven together in... the womb" (v.15 NLT). Now, that's attention at the highest level, right? So give God thanks: you were created, inspected and approved in heaven before you moved a muscle on earth. (2) *With understanding.* Discover God's purpose for your life. You weren't designed to impress others or to seek their approval. In God's eyes, your looks are not the measure of your worth. "The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1Sa 16:7 NLT). Start seeing yourself as God sees you. Ultimately, His opinion is the only one that matters. Indeed, "He decided in advance that [his people] would be conformed to the image of his Son" (Ro 8:29 CEB). Rejoice! God won't be finished working on you until He's made you just like Jesus.

TUESDAY AUGUST 27

**"Make every minute count."****Eph 5:16 CEV****HOW QUICKLY THEY GROW!**

**D**o you remember wishing your kids were grown? Suddenly you're amazed at how quickly it's happening. The truth is, they'll soon be gone, leaving the place feeling deserted and quiet. Bob Benson puts it poignantly: "I pass a lot of houses on my way home; some pretty, some inviting. But my heart skips a beat when I see my house nestled against the hill. I'm especially proud of the way it looks because I drew the plans myself. It started out large enough for us. I even had a study, in which two teenage boys now reside! It had a guest room, but my girl and nine dolls are permanent guests there now. It had a room for Peg, who hoped to turn it into her sewing room. But two boys swinging on the Dutch door have claimed that room. Right now it appears I'm not much of an architect. But it'll get larger again. One by one they'll go away to college, work, the service, their own homes. Then there'll be room: a guest room, a sewing room, a study, just for the two of us. But it won't be empty. Every corner, room, nook in the coffee table will be full of memories. Memories of picnics, Christmases, birthdays, bedside vigils... going barefoot, vacations, cats, dogs, black eyes... graduations, first dates, arguments, ball games... and a thousand other things that fill the lives of those who rear five kids. And Peg and I will sit quietly by the fire and listen to the laughter in the walls." Childhood and youth evaporate swiftly. So fill them with loving, wonderful, sustaining memories. "Make every minute count."

**SPEAK WORDS OF LIFE AND HEALTH**

James writes, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (Jas 1:26 NIV). The poet wrote, "Oh I say the things that I never should, just want to be heard or I never would. Talk on and on and know it's wrong; the trouble is, my tongue's too long." So how can you control your tongue's negative propensity? Engage it positively. How? (1) *Be an encourager!* "Gentle words cause life and health." Your words can help a hopeless person keep on living and motivate a sick loved one to fight illness and become whole. Encouragers are God's frontline against defeat, despair and depression! (2) *Speak the truth in love.* Saying what needs to be heard is often hard, but being a friend requires saying difficult things. "Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy" (Pr 27:6 NLT). Truth spoken in love can release people from their delusions, misperceptions and inflexibility to live free, productive lives. (See Jn 8:32). (3) *Ask God for the right words.* "The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable" (Jo 10:32 NAS). How do you know what words the hearer will accept? Let God be your guide. (4) *Make your words life-giving.* "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death" (Pr 13:14 NIV). The people you meet need words that turn them from spiritual death to eternal life. So today, speak words of life and health.

THURSDAY AUGUST 29

**"But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Ro 5:20 NIV****GRACE AT HOME (1)**

You need a lot of grace in marriage. Even in the best of relationships, things happen that cause misunderstanding and hurt. Speaking about his marriage, therapist Michael Sytsma says: "Before I was married, God said, 'Mike, you have some rough edges. To help you become more Christlike, I'm giving you Karen. That should do the trick.' So he brought Karen...into my life to identify all my shortcomings. My first response when she points out my flaws? Not gratitude! Instead, I strike back: 'How dare you point out those things? What's your problem?' Then I have the opportunity of either denying my feelings, or owning them and maturing. And Karen can either harbor anger and resentment, or offer grace and forgiveness. Imagine a marriage filled with grace: a spouse who extends joy, pleasure, sweetness, kind speech and unmerited favor. My wife does that. I'm still working at it."

Here is the first of four ways you can show grace to your spouse: (1) *Try to look at it differently.* Focus on the positive. If you think your spouse is stubborn, feeling loving toward them is hard. But if you exercise grace and choose to see them as persistent and tenacious, loving them becomes much easier. If they're disorganized, by grace you can choose to see that as a sign they are spontaneous, or creative, or the flexible type, or even over-extended. "You'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things...noble...gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse" (Pmp 4:8 TM). People usually try to live up to the image you hold of them!

**GRACE AT HOME (2)**

Here are three more steps to treating your spouse with grace: (1) *See them as God created them to be.* Focusing on your partner's flaws doesn't help either of you. The Pharisees saw only the worst in the woman caught in adultery. Jesus didn't minimize her sin, but chose to see what she could become through grace. "I don't condemn you. Go, and stop what you're doing" (See Jn 8:11). Grace enables you to see beyond your spouse's upsetting ways and work with God in helping them become the "new creature" He's called them to be. (2) *Celebrate them.* Too often we try to impose on our spouse our desired image of them. We resent them and insist they change, see it our way, and do things to our required standard. If they don't, we think they're inconsiderate, unloving, even un-Christian. Grace doesn't operate that way! It understands, accepts, forgives, and leaves changing others up to God. Try telling yourself, "Yes, that annoys me, but I wonder what God's trying to work out in my spouse." Then step back, love and accept them and let God work on them. (3) *Forgive them.* Your spouse will irritate you at times because of what they are. We're all different. She thinks she's detailed; he thinks she's nit-picking. He thinks he's laid-back; she thinks he's lazy. We act out the image we hold of ourselves, and that'll change only when God changes it! Acknowledge your intolerance and forgive your partner's irritating behaviors—even before they do them. That's "pre-emptive forgiveness," the kind that denies resentment a toe-hold on your marriage.

SATURDAY AUGUST 31

**"He sought his God...And so he prospered."****2Ch 31:21 NIV****GOD'S PLAN FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL**

The conditions in our country today are similar to those in ancient Israel. In spite of all God's blessings, the people had turned their back on Him. So when Hezekiah, a man of integrity, came to the throne, he set his heart on restoring God to His rightful position of leadership in the land. Notice four things he did: (1) He reopened the doors of God's house and called the people to repent and return to the Lord. (2) He challenged the corruption and carnality which had become a way of life even among leaders and ministers of the Lord. His words were strong: "Sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place" (2Ch 29:5 NKJV). Can you see a parallel to the day in which we live? (3) He reestablished the supremacy of God's Word. "They went in to purify the temple of the Lord...following the word of the Lord" (v. 15 NIV). Pastor, a Sunday morning sermon alone won't cut it; you need to get your people into God's Word every day. (4) He called the people to worship God. It was an amazing scene. "The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed" (v. 28 NIV). Scholars estimate that for over three hours the entire nation stood in God's presence and worshipped Him. Did God bless Hezekiah's efforts? "In everything that he undertook...he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered." And that's God's plan for spiritual renewal!



**SO WE MUST LISTEN  
VERY CAREFULLY TO  
THE TRUTH WE HAVE  
HEARD, OR WE MAY  
DRIFT AWAY FROM IT.**

**HEBREWS 2:1**

## **THREE REASONS WHY YOU NEED JESUS**

Jesus loves you! He desires to have a relationship with you,  
and to give you a life full of joy and purpose.

Why do you need Him in your life?

### **1. BECAUSE YOU HAVE A PAST.**

You can't go back, but He can. The Bible says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). He can walk into those places of sin and failure, wipe the slate clean, and give you a new beginning.

### **2. BECAUSE YOU NEED A FRIEND.**

Jesus knows the worst about you, yet He believes the best. Why? Because He sees you not as you are but as you will be when He gets through with you. What a friend!

### **3. BECAUSE HE HOLDS THE FUTURE.**

Who else are you going to trust? In His hands you are safe and secure—today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. His Word says, "For I know the plans I have for you...plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen" (Jeremiah 29:11–12 TLB).

If you'd like to begin a personal relationship with Jesus today,  
please pray this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I invite You into my life.

I believe You died for me and that Your blood pays  
for my sins and provides me with the gift of eternal life.

By faith I receive that gift, and

I acknowledge You as my Lord and Savior. Amen.

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## READ THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR

- |                             |                            |                           |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Jun 1: Proverbs 8 - 11      | Jul 1: Isaiah 60 - 63      | Aug 1: Ezekiel 25 - 27    |
| Jun 2: Proverbs 12 - 14     | Jul 2: Isaiah 64 - 66      | Aug 2: Ezekiel 28 - 30    |
| Jun 3: Proverbs 15 - 17     | Jul 3: Jeremiah 1 - 3      | Aug 3: Ezekiel 31 - 32    |
| Jun 4: Proverbs 18 - 20     | Jul 4: Jeremiah 4 - 5      | Aug 4: Ezekiel 33 - 35    |
| Jun 5: Proverbs 21 - 23     | Jul 5: Jeremiah 6 - 8      | Aug 5: Ezekiel 36 - 38    |
| Jun 6: Proverbs 24 - 26     | Jul 6: Jeremiah 9 - 11     | Aug 6: Ezekiel 39 - 40    |
| Jun 7: Proverbs 27 - 29     | Jul 7: Jeremiah 12 - 14    | Aug 7: Ezekiel 41 - 43    |
| Jun 8: Proverbs 30 - 31     | Jul 8: Jeremiah 15 - 17    | Aug 8: Ezekiel 44 - 46    |
| Jun 9: Ecclesiastes 1 - 4   | Jul 9: Jeremiah 18 - 21    | Aug 9: Ezekiel 47 - 48    |
| Jun 10: Ecclesiastes 5 - 8  | Jul 10: Jeremiah 22 - 24   | Aug 10: Daniel 1 - 3      |
| Jun 11: Ecclesiastes 9 - 12 | Jul 11: Jeremiah 25 - 27   | Aug 11: Daniel 4 - 5      |
| Jun 12: Song of Songs 1 - 4 | Jul 12: Jeremiah 28 - 30   | Aug 12: Daniel 6 - 8      |
| Jun 13: Song of Songs 5 - 8 | Jul 13: Jeremiah 31 - 32   | Aug 13: Daniel 9 - 12     |
| Jun 14: Isaiah 1 - 3        | Jul 14: Jeremiah 33 - 36   | Aug 14: Hosea 1 - 4       |
| Jun 15: Isaiah 4 - 8        | Jul 15: Jeremiah 37 - 39   | Aug 15: Hosea 5 - 9       |
| Jun 16: Isaiah 9 - 11       | Jul 16: Jeremiah 40 - 43   | Aug 16: Hosea 10 - 14     |
| Jun 17: Isaiah 12 - 14      | Jul 17: Jeremiah 44 - 46   | Aug 17: Joel 1 - 3        |
| Jun 18: Isaiah 15 - 19      | Jul 18: Jeremiah 47 - 48   | Aug 18: Amos 1 - 4        |
| Jun 19: Isaiah 20 - 24      | Jul 19: Jeremiah 49 - 49   | Aug 19: Amos 5 - 9        |
| Jun 20: Isaiah 25 - 28      | Jul 20: Jeremiah 50 - 50   | Aug 20: Obadiah 1 - 1     |
| Jun 21: Isaiah 29 - 31      | Jul 21: Jeremiah 51 - 52   | Aug 21: Jonah 1 - 4       |
| Jun 22: Isaiah 32 - 34      | Jul 22: Lamentations 1 - 2 | Aug 22: Micah 1 - 4       |
| Jun 23: Isaiah 35 - 37      | Jul 23: Lamentations 3 - 5 | Aug 23: Micah 5 - 7       |
| Jun 24: Isaiah 38 - 40      | Jul 24: Ezekiel 1 - 4      | Aug 24: Nahum 1 - 3       |
| Jun 25: Isaiah 41 - 43      | Jul 25: Ezekiel 5 - 8      | Aug 25: Habakkuk 1 - 3    |
| Jun 26: Isaiah 44 - 46      | Jul 26: Ezekiel 9 - 12     | Aug 26: Zephaniah 1 - 3   |
| Jun 27: Isaiah 47 - 49      | Jul 27: Ezekiel 13 - 15    | Aug 27: Haggai 1 - 2      |
| Jun 28: Isaiah 50 - 52      | Jul 28: Ezekiel 16 - 17    | Aug 28: Zechariah 1 - 5   |
| Jun 29: Isaiah 53 - 56      | Jul 29: Ezekiel 18 - 20    | Aug 29: Zechariah 6 - 10  |
| Jun 30: Isaiah 57 - 59      | Jul 30: Ezekiel 21 - 22    | Aug 30: Zechariah 11 - 14 |
|                             | Jul 31: Ezekiel 23 - 24    | Aug 31: Malachi 1 - 4     |